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SEPTEMBER 2003

CHOICE

Independent information for smart consumers

Tests

- KNEE-HIGHS
- TOOTHBRUSHES
- WASHING MACHINES

RETIREMENT VILLAGE RIP-OFFS

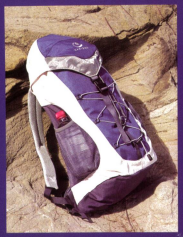
PREMIUM BEER

48 coldies on trial

Hot potato!

ANIMAL OR VEGETABLE?

COMING SOON IN CHOICE



DIGITAL CAMERAS

REVERSE-CYCLE AIR CONDITIONERS

68 cm TVs

DAYPACKS

TRAVEL INSURANCE

PIZZA

this month Online

www.choiceextra.com.au

This is the free website exclusive to CHOICE personal subscribers (see far right). Look out for this symbol in magazine articles — it indicates there's extra info online.

Washing machines

If you're looking for a washing machine now, go no further than CHOICEextra this month. Our interactive compare-a-product feature finds models that will suit you based on your own preferences. Go to 'W' in the A-Z index and click on Sep 03 under 'washing machines'.

More car info

Go to 'cars' and you'll find all our recent articles on reliability, repair costs and safety — no need to sort through your back issues.

www.choice.com.au

CHOICE's public website, including content from *Computer* CHOICE, 'compare-a-product' features and news on consumer issues and our public campaigns.

GM food

Check out our updated report on this topical and contentious issue. Go to www.choice.com.au/food.

Personal CHOICE subscribers can have a discounted membership to www.choice.com.au for just $7.50 per quarter (see page 50). If you currently have free access for 12 months, this will continue until that time is up, after which the discounted subscription will be available.

Retirement villages: handle with care

Whether you're thinking of a retirement village for yourself or for older relatives, you'd probably be surprised at the minefield you're getting into. We found broken promises, complex ownership structures, high entry charges, steep ongoing costs and departure fees little short of scandalous when we asked CHOICE subscribers to tell us about their experiences (see page 12).

While moving in can cost you thousands in 'administration charges', stamp duty and solicitors' fees, if you want to move out it's not unusual to make a loss on the transaction even if the unit is sold at a higher price than you paid for it. Some contracts demand a departure fee based on a percentage of the purchase price and the length of your residence *as well as* 100% of any capital gain on the unit's sale.

And if a village with three tiers of accommodation (self-care, hostel and nursing home) leads you to believe you'd automatically be entitled to move through the tiers as your health requires, think again. Residential care for older people who can't look after themselves is regulated by the Commonwealth Government, and someone living in a retirement village with a nursing home is no more entitled to move into it than any other older person living at another address.

Most CHOICE subscribers who spoke to us don't think state laws go far enough to protect retirement village residents from unscrupulous operators, and say more enforcement action needs to be taken to ensure operators are meeting their obligations.

So, as so often, it's a case of buyer beware — a sad state of affairs in an industry serving people who aren't always best placed to look after their rights for themselves.

Jane Mackenzie
Editor

PRICE INCREASE

Due to increased production costs, the price of a CHOICE subscription is unfortunately increasing. The new prices, effective from October 1, 2003, will be:

- Personal subscribers: quarterly $16.50, one year $66, two years $123.
- Institution/company subscriptions: one year $105, two years $200.

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Photo: Rhonda Thwaite

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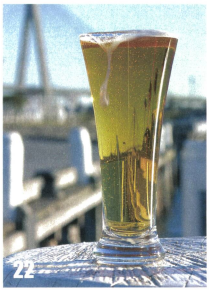
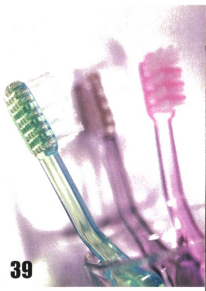




www.CHOICEextra.com.au

Have you tried CHOICEextra yet? To use this free website for CHOICE magazine personal subscribers, you'll need to log in with your subscriber number, which is the eight-digit number above your name on the mailing label that comes with the magazine. We hope you like it.

HALF A PRODUCT OF AUSTRALIA

CHOICE has been calling for clearer guidelines and strong enforcement of country of origin labelling for many years. A survey of CHOICE subscribers a few years ago showed that 93% of you were interested in buying Australian. What our research found, though, was a confusing labelling system that was of more benefit to manufacturers than consumers.

Recent action by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has provided a clearer definition and reinforcement of the criteria stated in the Trade Practices Act for 'Product of Australia' claims.

The ads and labelling for **VIVA Extra Virgin Olive Oil** claimed it was a product of Australia; made in Australia; and made only of olive oil from Australia. Since it in fact contained up to 50% imported oil, the ACCC took the company to court.

To meet the 'Product of a country' test according to the Trade Practices Act, each significant ingredient of the product must be sourced from the country represented to be the country of origin and, furthermore, all or most of the processes involved in the production or manufacture of the product must occur in that country.

In an uncontested hearing, the Federal Court said that the South Australian Olive Corporation and Inglewood Olive Processors had "engaged in misleading and deceptive conduct" and "made false representations about the olive oil" in TV and magazine advertising and on product labels. They'd also "engaged in conduct that was liable to mislead its customers or potential customers as to the nature, manufacturing process or the characteristics of the olive oil". Both parties consented to the associated court orders.

VANESSA MARSHALL

(Origin Olives Australasia bought the **VIVA** brand in August last year, and wasn't involved in the contraventions.)

Let's hope this action and ruling finally mean a crackdown on country of origin labelling, so we can better trust the information we often rely on when making a purchase decision. **VIVA** at least now has a different label.

Eternal fungus

The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) has advised more than 1500 recipients of unsolicited samples of a fungus called *Ganoderma lucidum* (also known as ling zhi) that

AQIS

UPDATE

ENERGY OFFERS

CHOICE, July 2003

In CHOICE, July 2003, page 30, we reported that TXU's negotiated offers don't come with a fixed-term contract and early termination fee. TXU has now informed us that this is correct only for its 55 Plus product for pensioners. The offers applicable to most of our case studies (Life Energy Couples and Life Energy Families) in fact have a minimum contract term of 12 months, and an early termination fee of $50 for electricity, $30 for gas and $80 for dual-fuel customers.

Saving water

Installing water-efficient appliances in your home can save large amounts of water every day. For example, a water-efficient showerhead can reduce your water consumption by at least 11 L per minute; a water-efficient washing machine by more than 135 L every wash, a water-efficient dishwasher by up to 28 L per wash, and a water-efficient dual-flush toilet by up to 42 L in a so-called flush cycle (four half and one full flushes).

But how do you know which appliances are particularly water-efficient? There's a water conservation labelling scheme, but unlike the one for energy efficiency, it's only voluntary. In the home it covers shower heads, dishwashers, washing machines, taps and toilets, and the ratings are from A for moderately water-efficient appliances to AAAAA for excellent efficiency.

Because the scheme is voluntary, though, not all suppliers label their products, and those that do tend to register only their most water-efficient ones. At the time of writing, the Water Services Association of Australia, which runs the scheme, had on its website 105 washing machines and 30 dishwashers registered with multiple A ratings, but none with a single A.

But selective labelling may soon be a

they may have to wait a bit longer for eternal youth. From European-based company Friedrich Mueller International House of Nature, it's claimed to be the "life elixir of the gods", but the untreated fungus has been confiscated due to concerns that its spores could lead to the deaths of native and plantation trees in Australia.

The company claims the fungus will improve circulation, reduce cholesterol, lower blood pressure, boost the immune system and even destroy tumours. Not only that, but it knows whether you're trying to gain or lose weight and helps with that as well.

Ganoderma is available in an authorised capsule form in Australia, but is banned from including the above claims. Products that are authorised by the Therapeutic Goods Administration have an 'AUST L' number on the label.

Protecting your computer

Personal firewall software acts as a gateway between your computer and the internet, ensuring that any internet traffic, from emails to antivirus updates, is authorised to enter or leave your computer. It also camouflages your computer's presence on the internet, so hackers can't find you.

CHOICE's sister magazine *Computer* CHOICE recommends firewall software for anyone using the internet, but it's essential if you:

- Have a **broadband internet connection.** The longer your computer's connected to the internet, the higher the risk of being hacked.
- Have a **static IP address** — the unique number that identifies the location of every computer connected to the internet. More common to broadband connections, some dial-up services also use them. Check with your internet service provider.
- Regularly **download games, music or programs** from the web. This can increase the risk of accidentally downloading malicious software often used by hackers to gain control of your computer.

Computer CHOICE recently tested 10 personal firewalls, looking for easy-to-use products that offer a high level of protection against unauthorised traffic originating both outside and inside your computer.

While most products tested will adequately protect your computer against attacks from the outside, only a few products could stop breaches originating from malicious software hidden on your computer.

The standout performer was **ZONELABS ZoneAlarm Firewall 3.7**. It was the most comprehensive firewall for monitoring and blocking both incoming and outgoing traffic and is easy to use straightaway, with clear, concise instructions. It's also one of the few firewalls available by free download for personal use — an added bonus.

McAFEE Firewall 4 and **NORTON Personal Firewall 2003** are also intuitive and easy to use, but neither maintains **ZoneAlarm**'s level of protection against malicious traffic from inside your computer.

For more information on firewalls and the risks you face connecting to the internet, read the article in *Computer* CHOICE, July/August 2003. To subscribe, call 1800 069 552.

thing of the past. Australian and New Zealand environment ministers have agreed to develop a mandatory water efficiency labelling scheme covering showerheads, washing machines, dishwashers and toilets — the four appliances that account for over 80% of indoor residential water use. Once it's implemented, manufacturers will have to provide water efficiency information on their products.

The mandatory scheme would be better if it had two other improvements on current arrangements:

- Regulations in the relevant standards about a dishwasher's or washing machine's rinse effectiveness, so that manufacturers can't just reduce the water consumption in the rinse cycles to get a better water efficiency rating.
- The ratings based on 'normal' wash programs, not special water-saving programs that most people wouldn't choose regularly.

We'll be pushing for these to be part of the water conservation labelling scheme. In the meantime, our washing machines test (page 42) gives details of 46 models' water usage and scores for water efficiency.

SEDA

Can you help?

GOT A PORTABLE FRIDGE?

If so, we'd like to find out if you're satisfied with its performance, and we'd appreciate your taking the time to answer the following questions:

- What's the brand and model of your portable fridge?
- How old is it (year purchased)?
- What type is it: 240 V/12 V/24 V/gas?
- Is it thermoelectric, two-way or three-way, fridge and/or freezer?
- Have you been happy with it?
- What do you mainly use it for?
- Have you had any problems with it?
- Have you had it repaired? If so, what was the problem?

Please write to us at **Portable fridges,** CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, fax us on (02) 9577 3377, or email us at portablefridges@choice.com.au by the end of September.

Thank you for your help.

LOYALTY SCHEMES

For an upcoming article we're interested in your experiences with loyalty schemes attached to credit cards. In particular:

- Do you think your loyalty scheme gives you good value?
- Have you experienced a rise in fees in the last 12 months?
- How did you choose your card?
- Which rewards are most important for you?
- Have you taken any rewards and if so, which?

We'd also like to hear of any experiences you've had — good or bad — that you think other consumers might be interested in.

Please write to us by September 15 at **Loyalty schemes,** CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, fax us on (02) 9577 3377 or email loyalty@choice.com.au. Thank you for your help.

VANESSA MARSHALL

HAGGLING FOR MONEY PRODUCTS

We'd like to hear from you if you've managed to get a good deal on your banking, mortgage, insurance, credit card, investments or other money products. We'd be especially interested if:

You managed to get discounts or other benefits by haggling.

Your bank, insurance company or other financial product provider agreed to match a deal you'd seen somewhere else.

You got a rebate or discount because of your loyalty to an institution.

You found a cheaper deal by shopping around or by using a discount broker, non-bank lender, mortgage or insurance broker.

You received a discount by using an internet service.

And we'd love to hear about any smart techniques or tricks you've used to get the most out of a financial product, such as avoiding fees by changing the way you bank.

Please write to **Haggling,** CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, fax us on (02) 9577 3377 or send an email to haggling@choice.com.au by the end of September. Thank you for your help.

WORLD CONSUMER SNAPSHOT

TAMPONS FOR CONTRACEPTION?

Surely an absurd suggestion! Not so for every fifth young person questioned by a Munich institute for youth research, reports *Test* magazine. With so many sources of information at their disposal, you'd think young people nowadays would know better ...

ITCHY EARS?

We didn't know itchy ears were such a big problem, says the Dutch consumer magazine *Consumentengids*. It reviewed the ear scratcher: a little plastic device with a stainless steel loop curette you insert into your ear to, well, scratch it and remove earwax.

You don't actually need to clean the inner parts of your ears, though, says the magazine. After all, earwax has a protective function. As for the itch itself, it's usually harmless and doesn't last long — only a continued or serious itch warrants a visit to a doctor. One more useless — and potentially even harmful — product.

DATE HUNTING

Danish retailers aren't supposed to sell you stuff that's past its use-by date, so if you happen to come across something that's expired, they offer bribes to keep you happy: a bottle of wine, a packet of coffee, a box of chocolates or even the same item, non-expired, free.

And so we have Denmark's *Tænk+Test* magazine reporting on Siegfried Jürgensen, a quasi-professional 'date hunter', who hasn't paid for groceries or wine in 10 years. At the supermarkets where they offer 'new for old', Siegfried simply fills up one trolley with expired goodies and another with the same but non-expired items, then wheels them up to the cashier for his free haul. And then it's off to other supermarkets for some wine, coffee and chocolates.

And they say there's no such thing as a free lunch!

yourletters

CHOICE Shopper satisfaction

Thank you for the superb service we received when we bought our TV and video player through CHOICE Shopper.

Indeed, we were delighted with the price and prompt delivery of the items, and the courtesy of the staff.

This is a wonderful service for CHOICE subscribers, which we recommend to anyone wanting hassle-free shopping.

Again, sincere thanks for CHOICE Shopper and your first-class magazine.

Pauline and Laurie Stott
Twin Waters, Queensland

CHOICE Shopper is a service we provide to personal CHOICE subscribers. You can save on just about any appliance that costs more than $100. Over the past year, around five electrical products have been bought every day, saving on average around 10% on the price subscribers had found themselves. Subscribers have also saved around 5% (and a lot of hassle) buying cars.

All you need is the brand and model number you want to buy (and, in the case of a car, any extras you want included), the price you want to beat, and your CHOICE subscriber number (from the mailing label with the magazine). When you're ready to buy, call CHOICE Shopper on 1300 360 655 (9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday, wherever you are in Australia).

More headaches for bank customers

Recently, on a Saturday, my partner's NAB access card was inexplicably swallowed by an ATM outside an NAB bank in Brisbane.

The sign on the ATM gave a number for him to call. The number was disconnected. It also said he should visit the branch on the next business day. When he did (and this involved a long drive across town) bank staff explained that the ATM service is outsourced and they are no longer able to retrieve cards that have been 'eaten'. They assured my partner that his card would be destroyed and he could apply to be issued with a replacement, which took several days.

I have two problems with this. First, shouldn't the bank take some responsibility for making sure customers can use the telephone number on the machine to at least report an incident of this kind? We're always hearing about people tampering with ATMs. What if this was the case and his account had been accessed illegally?

Second, why ask the customer to come into the branch if they're unable to recover their card anyway?

Surely the bank should have accurate information on the machine and perhaps even a warning to customers to use ATMs at their own risk.

Jill Lindquist
Via internet

The National Australia Bank told us: "Unfortunately the information that was on the ATM was out of date and we apologise to the customer for any inconvenience.

"In this case, the ATM had not been appropriately maintained, resulting in old information being displayed. Please be assured that this issue is being fixed.

"We are also undertaking a review of ATM presentation standards through our contracted suppliers to ensure that National ATMs have the correct information.

"In relation to cards that are captured by an ATM, the process is that the cards are retained for 48 hours. If we have not received a request within that time for the card to be returned, then it's destroyed for security reasons.

"If a customer's card is captured, the first point of call should be the National ATM customer line on 1800 036 066. A customer can then elect to have the card returned or a new one issued."

THUMBS UP!

▮ **Devitt Larkin, via internet, awards a thumbs-up to TAMBURLAINE VINEYARD in the Hunter Valley. Devitt had cellared a '98 vintage cabernet sauvignon that he found "far from the nectar of the gods" when opened. When he emailed the vineyard, they told him they'd had problems with some of the corks used for that vintage and replaced the case with another of comparable vintage.**

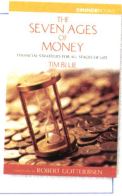
▮ **Jack Gearing, aged nine, via internet, awards a thumbs-up to RIPCURL. When he broke his arm recently, his new RIPCURL watchband had to be cut. When he couldn't find a watchband he liked, his father emailed the company, asking if they could help locate one. The reply arrived with a brand-new watch.**

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us, too. Address these letters to *Thumbs Up* at the address on page 50.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Jill Lindquist, receives *The Seven Ages of Money*, or any other book of her choice from Consumer Bookshelf, pages 36–38.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 50 for how to reach us.



ADMINISTRATOR FOR HEALTH FUND

The Private Health Insurance Administration Council (PHIAC) has appointed an administrator for the Queensland Teachers' Union Health Fund (TUH) and imposed a number of registration criteria on it.

However, if you're a member of this fund you don't need to be alarmed:

- PHIAC says the appointment of the administrator is a precautionary measure and that the fund is in a strong financial position.
- Operations of the fund are continuing as usual and members are receiving the benefits and services they're entitled to under their current policies.

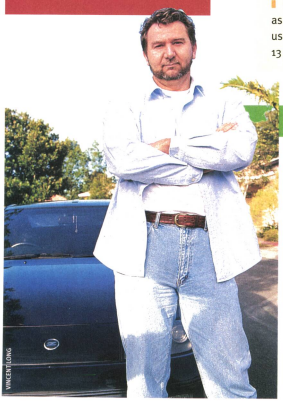
For more information contact TUH on 1300 360 701 or go to www.tuh.com.au.

ANTHONY PHELPS

Investor education seminars

Want to start saving for a deposit or plan your retirement? Here are some places for good investment information:

- The Australian Stock Exchange (ASX) runs workshops, online classes and correspondence courses covering topics suitable for both beginners and more seasoned investors. Phone 1300 300 279 or go to www.asx.com.au.
- The Australian Investors' Association (AIA) is a non-profit association for individual investors, and runs education conferences and seminars for all investors who wish to increase their investing knowledge. Phone 1300 555 061 or go to www.investors.asn.au.
- Centrelink's Financial Information Service (FIS) provides free investment information, as well as seminars and workshops. You don't have to be a Centrelink customer to make use of it. Call 13 23 00 to make an appointment with an information officer near you, 13 63 57 for information about seminars and workshops, or go to www.centrelink.gov.au.


VINCENT LONG

NO-CLAIM BONUS TRAP

With potential discounts of up to 70%, a no-claim bonus (NCB) can make a big difference to the car insurance premium you pay.

Josef Szeliga from Queensland has been driving for 22 years and has never made a claim on his car insurance. He says: "I had my Ford Falcon for 17 years. As the car was getting old I didn't insure it for the last two years. When I bought a new car and wanted to take out comprehensive insurance for it, my insurer told me that because I didn't have continuous comprehensive insurance I wasn't entitled to the full no-claim bonus."

The General Insurance Enquiries and Complaints Scheme (IEC) told us it's up to the discretion of the insurer to decide what no-claim bonus it applies to someone who's allowed their insurance policy to lapse.

The answer is to shop around for a good deal: the IEC recommends this and it's consistent with Josef's experience. He rang a number of insurers, finally finding one that let him retain the full no-claim bonus.

For information about general insurance, contact the IEC on 1300 78 08 08 or go to www.ieciltd.com.au

Animal or vegetable?

Which oven chips and wedges make the nutritional grade, while others are laden with artery-clogging saturated beef fat?

When you go shopping for oven-bake potato chips or wedges, you might think you're buying the kids some vegies they'll actually eat, but most contain a hefty whack of saturated beef fat — not exactly what you might have been expecting in the frozen veg aisle.

In fact, of the 65 varieties of oven-bake potato chips and snacks we checked out, 39 surprised us by being cooked in beef fat. And even the others that seemed better on the face of it weren't all cooked in something poly- or monounsaturated: four used palm oil, which is a saturated fat, and the labels of two others would only fess up to 'vegetable oil', which could mean anything.

THE GOOD NEWS

It's not all gloom and doom, though. If you choose carefully (see the table, page 11) you can find chips and wedges that are pretty low in fat — as low as 3%, which probably beats your home-made mash with milk and butter — and which won't blow out your salt intake for the day either.

THE BAD NEWS

If you're a hash brown addict, the bad news is that you'll be eating lots of saturated fat and going on a salt spree. Products like hash browns, gems, jewels and novelty potato products can challenge the most nutritionally savvy person when it comes to crafting a nutritional balance around them.

Sure, there's no problem in having such things occasionally, but a regular substitute for real vegies they're not.

THE BOTTOM LINE?

Look for the lowest-fat oven fries and wedges and you won't need to worry much about the kids eating them too often. But do cook them in the oven — not, as some packs somewhat bizarrely suggest, by frying them. That pretty much defeats the whole point.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **The majority of frozen** *chips, wedges and potato shapes are cooked in beef fat, rather than more heart-friendly oils like canola.*
- **If the kids clamour** *for more or you're watching your weight, it's possible to buy healthier chips or wedges — see the table, page 11.*

HOW MUCH POTATO?

New regulations that mean we now see the percentage of key ingredients on our packages often reveal some surprising info.

You might expect wedges not to be all potato — after all, there's that spicy coating — but some of the chips were also as low as 85% potato (though most were around 95%). The lower figure on some chips is generally because there's some sort of extra-crunch coating.

HOW THE SPUDS MEASURE UP

Potatoes are good stuff, nutritionally speaking, but all spuds aren't created equal. Here's how the fat measures up:

TYPE	FAT (%)
Boiled potato	<0.5
Jacket-baked potato	<0.5
Roast potato	4
Mashed potato*	5.5
Home-made chips	8.5
Fast food chips	17.5

* *With milk and margarine/butter.*

		1 TYPE OF FAT					
Product (in order of increasing fat content within groups)	**Fat** (%)	**Beef fat**	**Palm oil**	**Unspecified vegetable oil**	**Polyunsaturated vegetable oil**	**Canola oil**	**Sodium** (mg per 100 g)
WEDGES							
McCAIN Healthy Choice country style potato wedges	3.0					✓	40
FARMLAND Chunky potato wedges	5.7	✓					358
McCAIN Hot Banditos crunchy potato wedges	6.1				✓		415
SEASONS PRIDE Mildly spiced potato wedges **(A)**	6.5			✓			305
BIRDS EYE Golden Crunch wedges	6.8	✓					297
BIRDS EYE Originals chunky wedges	8.0	✓					300
CHIPS							
McCAIN Healthy Choice chunky cut	3.0					✓	68
McCAIN Healthy Choice straight cut french fried potatoes	3.0					✓	68
BLACK & GOLD Potato chips	3.1	✓ **(B)**				✓ **(B)**	39
LOGAN FARM Crinkle cut oven fries	3.2					✓	3
LOGAN FARM Golden Gourmet crinkle cut chips	3.2	✓					59
LOGAN FARM Golden Gourmet straight cut chips	3.2	✓					59
LOGAN FARM Straight cut oven fries	3.2					✓	3
SEASONS PRIDE Crinkle cut chips **(A)**	3.2	✓					59
BIRDS EYE Canola home style oven bake chips	3.4					✓	13
BIRDS EYE Originals straight chips	3.4	✓					14
BIRDS EYE Canola steakhouse cut oven bake chips	3.5					✓	15
McCAIN Superfries chunky cut	3.6	✓					43
McCAIN Crunchy potato chips	3.7				✓		308
McCAIN Crunchy potato crinkles	3.7				✓		308
McCAIN Crunchy potato ripples	3.7				✓		308
McCAIN Home fries crisp 'n' crunchy original	3.7	✓					308
BIRDS EYE Originals crinkly chips	4.2	✓					13
SEASONS PRIDE Shoestring fries **(A)**	4.3	✓					120
McCAIN Superfries extra long french fries	4.4	✓					39
BIRDS EYE Canola crinkle cut oven bake chips	4.5					✓	14
SAVINGS Straight cut chips	4.6	✓					35
BIRDS EYE Canola french fries oven bake chips	4.7					✓	13
HOME BRAND Potato chips	4.9	✓					50
McCAIN Superfries crinkle cut	4.9				✓		44
McCAIN Superfries straight cut	4.9				✓		51
FARMLAND Canola chips	5.8					✓	50
FARMLAND Crinkle cut chips	5.8				✓		50
FARMLAND Straight cut chips	5.8				✓		50
BIRDS EYE Golden Crunch chips	6.3	✓					274
McCAIN Crunchy potato fries	6.4				✓		405
FARMLAND French fries	6.8	✓					50
McCAIN Superfries ripple cut	7.0				✓		64
HOME BRAND Shoestring chips	7.6	✓					60
McCAIN Superfries shoestring	7.6	✓					60
BIRDS EYE Golden Crunch fries	9.0	✓					300
BIRDS EYE Golden Crunch crinkles	9.5	✓					320

Product (in order of increasing fat content within groups)	Fat (%)	1 TYPE OF FAT: Beef fat	Palm oil	Unspecified vegetable oil	Polyunsaturated vegetable oil	Canola oil	2 Sodium (mg per 100 g)
HASH BROWNS							
McCAIN Shredded hash browns **(C)**	8.5	✓					453
SEASONS PRIDE Hash browns **(A) (D)**	8.5	✓					127
BIRDS EYE Hash brown triangles **(E)**	9.8	✓					215
BIRDS EYE Hash browns chunky potato portions **(F)**	11.6	✓					316
BIRDS EYE Traditional hash browns **(F)**	11.6	✓					316
BIRDS EYE Hash browns with onion **(F)**	11.7	✓					349
GEMS, NOVELTIES							
BIRDS EYE Potato gems original	6.3	✓					420
FARMLAND Potato royals	6.3	✓					420
MAGGI Pommes crunchy potato puffs	7.7			✓			360
McCAIN Potato nuggets	8.5	✓					127
SEASONS PRIDE Potato jewels **(A)**	8.5	✓					70
McCAIN Potato smiles **(G)**	8.7	✓					384
MAGIC TASTE FOODS Mini scalloped potato cakes, original flavour **(H)**	10.3		✓				281
MAGIC TASTE FOODS Mini scalloped potato cakes, salt & vinegar flavour **(H)**	10.3		✓				581
MAGIC TASTE FOODS Scalloped potato cakes **(J)**	10.3		✓				281
MAGIC TASTE FOODS Mini scalloped potato cakes, real chicken flavour **(H)**	10.4		✓				463
BIRDS EYE Potato gems cheese and onion	11.2	✓					300
ROASTS							
BIRDS EYE Oven roast vegetable mix rosemary and garlic	2.7	✓					120
BIRDS EYE Oven roast vegetable mix roast chicken flavour	3.0	✓					140
BIRDS EYE Oven roast vegetable mix cheesy sprinkle	3.1	✓					130
BIRDS EYE Oven roast vegetable mix Italian herb	3.4	✓					120
BIRDS EYE Oven roast potatoes rosemary and garlic	4.6	✓					170
BIRDS EYE Oven roast potatoes traditional style	4.7	✓					165

(A) *Available in Aldi stores.*
(B) *Contains beef tallow and/or canola oil.*
(C) *One hash brown weighs about 75 grams.*
(D) *One hash brown weighs about 65 grams.*
(E) *One hash brown weighs about 40 grams.*
(F) *One hash brown weighs about 60 grams.*
(G) *One potato smile weighs about 18 grams.*
(H) *One mini scallop weighs about 21 grams.*
(J) *One scallop weighs about 80 grams.*

1 Type of fat

As noted, most of the products are cooked in artery-clogging saturated fat, usually beef fat. Products cooked in fats such as monounsaturated canola or polyunsaturated vegetable oil are better choices. If the product only owns up to 'vegetable oil' you can't be sure it's not saturated, like palm oil, for example.

This column shows the main fat used; a few of the products that use some form of beef fat list smaller amounts of vegetable oil as well.

2 Sodium content

The recommended dietary intake for sodium is 920 to 2300 mg per day for adults. Children, especially young children, and people watching their salt intake should be aiming much lower — even the lower figure is a generous interpretation of what a healthy adult needs.

Beware RETIREMENT VILLAGE RIP

Ongoing and departure fees make it easy to end up leaving with less money than you moved in with.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Don't confuse retirement villages** *with hostels or nursing homes. Some operators promise guaranteed access to such aged care services — a promise they often can't deliver.*
- **'Departure fees' payable** *when you leave some villages are barely short of scandalous. Leaving can have a significant financial impact and limit your future choices for care and accommodation.*
- **Moving into a retirement village** *should never be seen as an investment. In fact, it can be a very costly exercise.*

The financial aspects of retirement village life are complicated, with many pitfalls for the unsuspecting. Laws vary from state to state and contracts and legal structures can vary from village to village. Ongoing fees can be significant, and those that apply when you leave a village can be particularly steep.

We're sure there are many happy retirement village residents throughout Australia, but our research indicates that a lot of residents become disappointed with their decision to move to a village. State government departments responsible for regulating retirement villages assure us they don't receive a large number of complaints from residents, but we've found strong examples of retirement village owners:

- Failing to properly inform current and prospective residents about their rights under state retirement village and contract laws.
- Failing to provide promised services and facilities.

In spite of state laws covering retirement villages, it's up to the consumer to look beyond the advertising promises and get the information to make a fully informed financial decision. Make sure you understand the long-term financial implications of your contract, and that everything you're told about services and fees is given to you in writing.

IT'S A BUSINESS

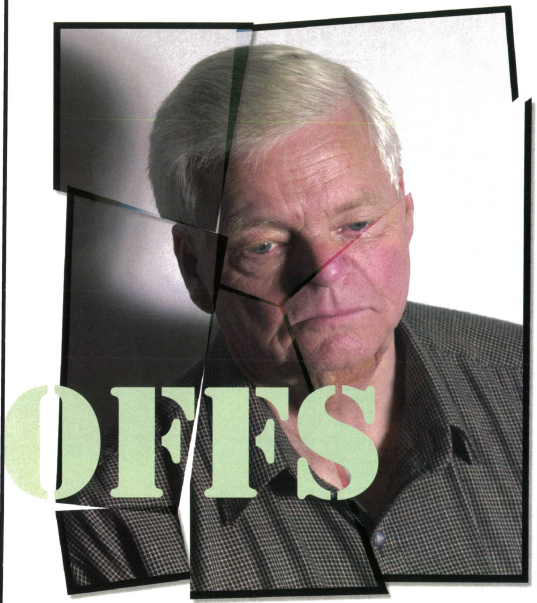
Retirement villages are a large and growing industry. In NSW alone there are around 35,000 residents living in about 700 villages.

Villages can be operated by private for-profit companies or community-based organisations like churches, service clubs and local governments. Private, for-profit villages are resident-funded. Residents pay the full cost of the buildings, management, maintenance and day-to-day running of the village.

Many not-for-profit villages operate on a similar resident-funded basis to private-sector villages and make a surplus (profit) from property sales. However, they're more likely to offer special deals for people who can't afford high entry costs and may use surpluses to subsidise other charitable activities.

Some of the CHOICE subscribers who wrote to us about their retirement village experiences had less than flattering things to say about their village owners and operators:

"Operators of retirement villages have a licence



PHOTOS: ANTHONY SAWERS

ACCREDITATION SCHEME

The Retirement Village Association of Australia (RVA) has a national accreditation scheme open to all retirement villages, which will be compulsory for RVA members from July 1, 2005. The scheme sets standards and requirements for the provision of information to residents, services, activities, dispute resolution and management practices. Go to www.rva.com.au.

to print money and the lack of 'people skills' by management is evident. All is sweetness and light until you move into the village, then if you question or disagree with management you're treated with contempt, classed as a troublemaker and told if you're not happy you're free to move." — *NL, NSW.*

Poor communication, a lack of management and financial skills and inexperience with caring for or dealing with the elderly were common problems identified by the residents who wrote to us. Others made allegations about intimidation and harassment of elderly occupants by some village operators.

One resident cautions: "Keep in mind that the owners of the village may appear to be friendly and helpful but they are, in fact, businessmen and their concern is for their business, not you." — *NM, Qld.*

SHOP AROUND

It's essential to examine what's on offer at a number of villages to ensure you end up with the best possible value for money.

Depending on which state you live in, you should receive certain information upfront, including disclosure documents that set out services, facilities, conditions of entry and fees. You should also be given an advance copy of the contract and any agreements relating to management, ongoing fees and laws governing retirement villages. Villages accredited under the Retirement Village Association's national scheme (see above) should definitely provide this information. It's well worth consulting a lawyer with retirement village experience for help understanding it.

Accommodation can vary from opulent villas to basic single-room apartments. Common facilities and services for residents also vary significantly. Make a list of what you want and decide how much you can afford to pay before you start looking.

When you visit a village, inspect the particular unit or villa, the entire village and the surrounding area. Look at the location of the property and think ahead to your future health and care needs.

"The operator selling self-care units on a steep gradient or away from services to people who obviously can't get about and in some cases who, on entering the village, clearly can't care for themselves, is morally wrong. It certainly makes for a quick turnover of units with the resultant financial bonus to the operator." — *NL, NSW.*

"You can talk to the residents but this will not reflect a true picture, as I was to find out. Many residents are afraid to speak out for fear of getting into trouble." — *JD, Qld.* Even so, it's worth

talking to residents and asking as many questions as possible of management.

PROMISES OF FUTURE CARE

Barbara Burnham from the NSW Retirement Village Residents Association says the language used by some village operators and government about 'three-level care' in retirement villages is open to misinterpretation.

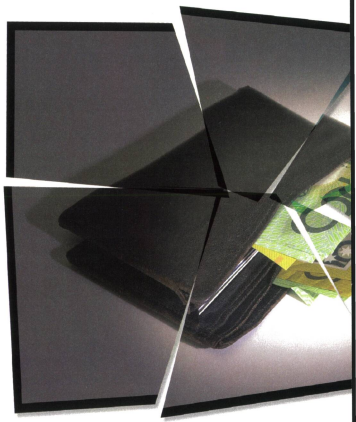
"People are quite often amazed to find that there is no aged care. They misinterpret the words 'three-level care'," Mrs Burnham says.

"If there is a hostel or nursing home on the same site as a village, it's sometimes implied, and the average older person understands, that if they live in the self-care accommodation, they have automatic transition to the hostel or nursing home.

"In fact, they will be no better placed to move into the higher level of subsidised care than any other older person living at any other street address," Mrs Burnham says.

So what does the language used by retirement village operators about levels of care really mean?

- **'Independent living'** or **'self-care units'** mean you're basically responsible for your own care, although extra services may be available that you pay for. **'Flexicare'** is a term for the services that are optional or available on a user-pays basis to residents who basically live in self-care accommodation.
- **'Assisted-living units'** offer personal services on a regular basis, but again this is for a fee.
- **Hostels and nursing homes**: Some villages do have hostel and nursing home facilities on the same site. However, they're Commonwealth-regulated and the allocation of places is determined on a needs basis — see *Residential care*, below left, for more on this. It has nothing to do with whether or not you're an existing village resident, though the Aged and Community Services Association says not-for-profit villages do attempt to transfer residents to an onsite hostel or nursing home if a vacancy exists.



Some operators promise prospective residents that they will develop such facilities at some time in the future but, according to the experiences of our readers, those promises don't always eventuate.

"Many of our residents purchased units because of the promise of after-care facilities when they were needed. They feel let down. There was even a promise of nursing home facilities in the future." — *BT, SA.*

LEGAL STRUCTURES

Entering a retirement village tends not to be as straightforward as buying a house or home unit in the broader community. There are several different 'ownership' structures:

- **Leasehold:** The resident leases the unit and contributes to the costs of common areas. You pay an initial 'contribution' in return for a lease to live in a particular unit for anything from 49 to 199 years.
- **Loan and licence agreement:** Offered by many non-profit village operators. The 'purchaser' provides the village owner with an interest-free loan; some operators also require a donation. You receive a licence to occupy in return. If you wish to leave the village, the owner keeps any donation and you may receive a refund of part of the interest-free loan, depending on what departure fees apply (see pages 16–17).

Residential care

Residential care for older people who can't look after themselves is regulated by the Commonwealth Government. The two levels of care available are hostels (low-level) and nursing homes (high-level). They are totally different from retirement villages, even if they are located near or on the same site as a village. An Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) has to assess and approve you before you can move into residential care.

Depending on your financial circumstances, you may be asked to pay a basic daily fee, an additional daily fee, an accommodation bond and/or an additional service fee when admitted to an aged care facility.

If you're able to continue living in your own home or retirement village unit the ACAT might be able to arrange a Home and Community Care (HACC) package to provide help around the house. For more information go to www.health.gov.au/acc or phone 1800 500 853 (Aged Care Information Line).

- **Strata title:** You own the unit and contribute to the maintenance of common areas.
- **Company title:** You buy a share or a number of shares in a company whose articles of association permit you to live in a unit for the rest of your life or for as long as you wish.
- **Unit trust:** Similar to a company title scheme but you buy a unit or units in a trust. The trustee gives you the right to occupy your home for the rest of your life or as long as you wish.
- **Rental arrangements:** Some villages set aside a number of premises for rent for retirees with few or no assets. You sign a lease and pay rent like other tenants.

Ongoing fees apply for each of the above legal arrangements. For instance, in strata title villages you will have to contribute to a common fund and the village operator may also charge fees under a service contract.

The ownership structure will have an impact on security of tenure and who is responsible for things like refurbishment and capital replacement costs. It also has an impact on your legal rights as well as on how much tax and stamp duty you'll have to pay.

"In the case of loan/licence, we are neither tenants nor home owners. Yet we handed over many thousands of dollars to purchase a home. At present we are unsecured creditors even though we may pay as much for our villa/unit as a person purchasing a similar strata title villa/unit." — *RH, NSW.*

Find a lawyer with retirement village experience to ensure you understand the legal implications of the contract you're entering into. Also consult your lawyer about the stamp duty implications of different types of title.

ENTRY COSTS

Your contract may describe entry costs as an entry price, purchase price, interest-free loan, refundable deposit, prepayment of rent, a lease premium, accommodation bond, ingoing contribution or a combination of some of the above.

For example, Neil and Lily purchased a 199-year lease on a two-bedroom unit for $187,000. On top was an 'entry administration charge' of $1000. They also had to pay stamp duty of $907.65 as well as $1000 in fees to their solicitor.

Financial loss a last resort

Michael and Irena (not their real names) moved into a Queensland 'retirement resort' in 1998 but moved out again in late 2002.

"We took up residence in the village believing that it offered amenities, security and lifestyle suitable to our eighth decade of life," Michael explains.

"The open friendliness of the sales and management staff and residents was particularly encouraging. We were further encouraged when we saw a company plan of proposed future developments in the village, which included a nursing home.

"We have no heirs so we were not concerned about the imposition of the deferred management fee as we intended staying for life, via the nursing home if necessary."

Within a few weeks of moving into the village, Michael and Irena became concerned at stories about management bullying some residents. "They had legitimate complaints or they were forbidden from employing tradesmen of their own choice. Instead, they were forced to employ management 'approved' tradesmen at greatly inflated prices.

"I witnessed a senior staff member berating an elderly female resident for daring to repeat an earlier complaint about a matter, claimed to be irreparable, but which was in the end fixed."

Michael was one of a number of residents who were eventually elected to the village's Residents' Committee. After a year of constant battling with management, most of the members of the committee resigned.

"In every case where residents of this village have pursued legal action through the (Queensland) Retirement Villages Tribunal to a conclusion, the applicants have been successful and the Tribunal has invariably been scathing in its assessment of the role of the company, its managers and staff.

"Despite this and the provision for severe penalties in the Queensland Retirement Villages Act, the Office of Fair Trading has done no more than to send inspectors to have a look."

The Queensland Office of Fair Trading (OFT) says that while a tribunal may find in favour of a resident, under the law such a decision alone may not be sufficient to initiate enforcement action. According to the OFT, "The vast majority of retirement villages in Queensland enjoy co-operative relationships between the operator and the residents. Residents who have concerns should contact the OFT on 1300 658 030."

Michael concludes: "Frustration at the remorseless actions of management, its continuing revision of its public information document to eliminate weaknesses in its control over the lives of residents, plus the feeling of abandonment because of government disinterest, finally forced us to leave the village at great financial loss.

"Many others have told us that they too would leave if only they could afford it."

You may have to pay extra for air conditioning, ceiling fans, extra power points, awnings, curtains and blinds if you want these features and they're not included in the entry price.

You also need to look out for poor workmanship or incomplete construction, as this resident points out:

"It was a couple of years after moving in that we began to be disenchanted with village life. There were many incidences of residents being charged for work on their premises, work that should have been done prior to completion of their units. We were never told or thought to ask about long-term or future costs to residents caused by shoddy workmanship." — *NL, NSW.*

ONGOING COSTS

Fortnightly, monthly or quarterly levies may be charged for upkeep of common areas, rates/water, building insurance, security, gardening and services like a village bus.

Each village will have its own method of determining how shared costs are calculated. For example, they can be a proportion of the Aged Pension (such as 85% of a single pension).

Before moving in, check how much authority the village owner/operator has to increase fees. In some states this is set out in the retirement village act; otherwise it should be in your contract.

"The management raised the fees by 3.6% in July last year for a 12-month period. Now, within six months, they want to present another budget with an increase of 14.765%. This makes an 18.4% rise in 12 months when the rise in the cost of living is approximately 4%." — *BW, NSW.*

You may find that you're responsible for the internal and external maintenance of your unit or villa and even other areas, depending on your contract and state law.

"Most of our contracts include clauses stating that we are responsible for any poor building practices — not only within our villas/units but on common property. The operator/builder builds shoddy construction and we (residents) are left to pick up the tab." — *RH, NSW.*

If you decide to leave, you may be required to continue paying fees until your unit is sold, even if you don't continue to live in it. Check your state law to find out what time limits apply, if any.

SERVICES AND FACILITIES

To avoid disappointment, find out exactly what services will be provided for those ongoing fees. Make sure promises about services are made in writing. Stories from some residents reveal that promises made about services may not be as good as they seem, while others simply don't eventuate.

"When we entered the village we were informed by management that the village had a personal alarm system for emergencies. We were familiar with such systems and having this facility helped us to make up our minds in favour of the village. It's not until you've been in about six weeks or so that you find out that the villagers themselves run the system out of hours." — *RH, NSW.*

"There were many carrots dangled to encourage sales during construction — onsite management, availability of meals if required, etc — which did not eventuate." — *GR, Qld.*

"We were promised nursing care, doctor's visiting room, meals if required in the dining room (gourmet meals at bistro prices), swimming pool and spa, workshop, library with computer facilities, all maintenance and gardening, etc. These promises came to naught, such as the nurse we met before we moved in, who had left, and when we asked who was replacing her the reply was 'you will have to pay more if you want a nursing staff here'." — *BW, NSW.*

SELLING UP

When you leave a retirement village, you may have to pay an exit fee, departure fee or 'deferred management fee'. These fees should be set out in your contract. Make sure you understand them before you move into the village — they can be extremely costly.

DEPARTURE FEE EXAMPLE

The Retirement Village Residents Association of NSW provided this example to illustrate the impact of ongoing fees and departure fees.

A person moved into a village in November 1999, occupying a leased, two-bedroom, den, two-bathroom unit. His entry cost was $350,000. Monthly fees paid for village administration and maintenance were $400 (or $4800 per year).

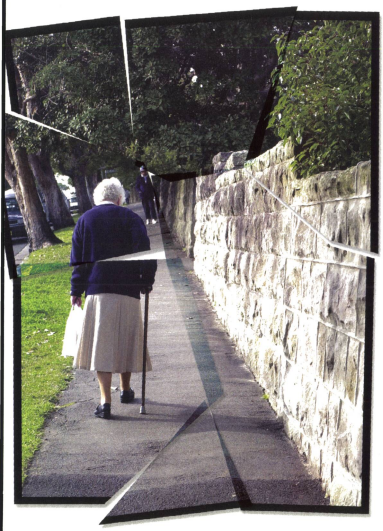
Unfortunately he had to move out of the village and sell his lease after almost three years. Departure fee calculations were made on the basis of three full years as a resident.

He sold at $435,000 and his contract stated that he would be charged a deferred management fee and 50% of any capital gain.

The deferred management fee amounted to $26,250 (2.5% of $350,000 for three years). The capital gain cost was a further $42,500 ($435,000 less $350,000 = $85,000; 50% of $85,000 = $42,500). He was also charged $13,050 as an agent's fee, plus there were legal costs and the cost of replacing carpet and other items.

The resident ended up with $347,700 — just less than the original entry price, but three years later. In other words, when considering ongoing fees and departure costs, he paid out a total of $101,700 or $33,900 per year to live in the village.

This was a self-care situation. The cost would be much higher if living in an assisted-care unit with food and cleaning provided.



"We have now left the so-called five-star village in which we purchased a very expensive apartment. The departure fee was 3% of the entry price per annum.

"The management were loath to carry out their obligations under the lease and it took months of negotiation with our solicitor to have them agree to an agent, even though other new units not yet sold were being advertised. All the negotiations with the village through our solicitor cost us dearly, in fact approximately $20,000." — *BW, NSW.*

The exit/departure fees payable are calculated in a variety of ways. For example:

- The operator is entitled to 100% of any capital gain on the sale of the unit. In addition the owner pays a set percentage of the entry price (for example, 2.5%) for each year they've lived in the village.
- Fees are based on a percentage of the entry price per year of occupation, as above, but the operator and resident share any capital gain (in proportions set out in the contract).
- Fees are based on a percentage of the resale price when the unit is sold, leased or licensed to a new resident. The operator is also entitled to a percentage of any capital gain — and this can be as high as 100%.

See *Departure fee example*, far left, for an example of one of these scenarios. It's not unusual to make a loss on the transaction even if the unit is sold at a higher price than you paid to move in. This can severely limit your future accommodation options.

The percentage rate at which the fee accrues per year of occupation can vary from around 2.5% to 10% of the entry or resale price. Sometimes the rate is higher in the first year or first couple of years of your residence.

The fee may also be subject to a minimum or maximum. If your village charges 2.5% per year for a maximum of 10 years, the maximum fee is 25% of the relevant amount. If your contract doesn't state a maximum, you'll end up getting nothing back if you stay at the village long enough.

Beware of contracts that state a minimum fee. Even if the accrued departure fee is lower, if the minimum fee is 10%, that's what you'll pay, even if you only stay one year.

A one-off administration fee may also be charged. It's generally based on the resale price and can be higher if you leave within a couple of years. Contracts that charge both a higher administration fee and a minimum departure fee penalise you twice for the same thing and should be avoided.

On top of all this, the village operator may require you to organise and pay for a building report and pest inspection.

Departure fees can be a trade-off for a lower entry price, so it's important to look at the overall cost of the deal. Is a lower entry price a real advantage if you lose 100% of any capital gain when you leave? Don't wait until it's too late to figure out the likely costs involved in leaving a village. Do the maths before you move in. You'll need to calculate:

- The market value of your unit or villa. (Estimate what this is likely to be in one, three, seven and 15 years from your purchase date. Use trends in the broader property market in the location of the village to determine its approximate value).
- The likely capital gain (the market value for one, three, seven and 15 years minus the entry price you'll pay to move in).
- The likely departure fee. The method of calculation should be set out clearly in your contract.
- The refund or exit entitlement you'd end up with.
- Your overall capital gain or loss (exit entitlement less your entry price).

Do the above sums for each retirement village you look at so you can compare deals.

If you invest extra in a unit or villa to make it more comfortable and the operator is entitled to 100% of any capital gain when you move out, you may not recoup money spent.

"Things we put into the unit that we didn't get any return for were two pergolas, landscaping, tiles in the patio area, insect screen doors on the patio and auto control doors on the garage." — *LA, Qld.*

Some contracts also give the village owner/operator exclusive selling rights over the unit. (Some state laws don't allow this, so check yours.) You may have to pay costs incurred by the village management related to the sale.

THANKS

Thank you to the retirement village residents who wrote to or emailed us with their experiences. We've used some of your experiences in this article as quotes. All the letters and emails we received were considered in our research.

PROTECTING YOUR RIGHTS

Each state and territory, except Tasmania, has its own specific law covering retirement villages (Tasmania is currently drafting one). Each has its own definition of a retirement village.

Each state law requires village operators to provide prospective residents with certain information in advance, such as a copy of the contract and any management agreements. Cooling-off periods may also apply. Each state has its own approach to resolving disputes between residents and village operators. See *Useful contacts*, right, to identify the department responsible for retirement villages in your state or territory.

Other laws may also apply if you purchase a strata, company or community title or unit trust. Separate laws may also apply if you live in a caravan park or relocatable-home village.

From our subscribers' comments, it appears that some residents think the state laws don't go far enough to protect them from unscrupulous village operators. They also think there needs to be more enforcement action taken to ensure operators are meeting their obligations.

"After a few months of living in the village, we asked for a quarterly statement, which is mandatory under the NSW Retirement Villages Act. For the whole 18 months we were living in the village, we did not receive one quarterly statement. No one knew what they were paying for." — *BW, NSW.*

"Until someone in the NSW Department of Fair Trading starts prosecuting some of the operators for blatant breaches of the Act, the industry will continue in turmoil. Licensing of operators and the risk of having that licence revoked could go a long way to bridging the current gulf." — *RH, NSW.*

Useful contacts

- www.itsyourlife.com.au is a useful website about retirement villages for prospective residents and their families. It includes directories of retirement villages, experienced law firms and a departure fee calculator.
- The Aged-care Rights Service (TARS): phone (02) 9281 3600 or 1800 424 079 (outside Sydney).
- The Aged and Community Services Association (represents mainly not-for-profit retirement village operators): phone (02) 9799 0900 or 1800 424 770.
- The Retirement Village Association Ltd of Australia (represents private-sector operators): phone (02) 9747 4732 or go to www.rva.com.au.
- ACT Department of Justice and Community Safety: phone (02) 6207 0500 or go to www.jcs.act.gov.au.
- NSW Office of Fair Trading: phone 13 32 20 or go to www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au.
- The NSW Retirement Village Residents Association (RVRA): phone (02) 9524 8862.
- NT Consumer and Business Affairs within the Department of Justice: phone 1800 019 319 or go to www.caba.nt.gov.au.
- Queensland Office of Fair Trading: phone (07) 3246 1560 or 1300 658 030, or go to www.fairtrading.qld.gov.au.
- Association of Residents of Queensland Retirement Villages: phone (07) 5476 8706.
- Queensland Aged and Disability Advocacy: phone 1800 818 338 or (07) 3637 6000.
- SA Department of Human Services: phone (08) 8226 8800 or go to www.dhs.sa.gov.au.
- SA Seniors Information Service: go to www.seniors.asn.au.
- SA Retirement Village Residents' Association: phone (08) 8232 0422.
- TAS Advocacy Tasmania: phone 1800 005 131.
- Consumer Affairs Victoria: phone (03) 9627 6000 or 1800 678 328.
- Seniors Information Victoria: phone 1300 135 090.
- Victorian Residential Care Rights: phone (03) 9602 3066 or 1800 133 312, or go to www.agedrights.asn.au. Click on Vic under associated sites. This website will also take you to relevant aged care services in other states.
- Western Australia Department of Consumer and Employment Protection: phone 1300 30 40 54 or go to www.docep.wa.gov.au.
- WA Advocare: phone (08) 9221 8599 or 1800 700 600, or email advocare@iinet.net.au.

PHOTOGRAPH: TONY SAWERS

USED CAR SAFETY

Which model should you pick if you're in the market for a safe used car?

Choosing a safer car could mean the difference between getting out of an accident with a fright or with a serious injury. Many new models offer sophisticated crash design and a range of safety equipment. But what if you're looking for a used car?

The latest used car safety ratings can help you make a decision. They're based on a study by the Monash University Accident Research Centre that analysed more than one million tow-away crashes between 1987 and 2000 on roads in NSW, Queensland, Victoria and WA, involving cars built between 1982 and 2000.

The ratings show how well a model protects its driver in an accident (crashworthiness), and also how much it endangers the driver of another vehicle involved in the crash (aggressivity).

THE MAIN FINDINGS

The results show some trends:

- Larger and more expensive used car models usually offer better protection for their drivers — not least because safety equipment such as airbags and ABS brakes weren't commonly found in smaller cars until recently.
- Heavy cars (such as big 4WDs and some large sedans) often have good crashworthiness but bad aggressivity due to simple physics: if a heavy car collides with a light one, the light one is worse off.
- The safety of a particular model often (but not always) improves over time due to better crash design and improved safety equipment.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

If you're in the market for a used car, some of the above findings may not seem very helpful. You probably have a certain budget (so the safer luxury car may not be an option) and certain needs (for example, most of your driving may be done in the city, so a large 4WD wouldn't make much sense).

So the used car safety ratings can only be part of your research to find the best model for you. Once you've decided on the best type of car for your needs, find the best model by comparing a range of aspects such as:

- **Reliability** — for example, from the CHOICE reliability survey (last published in September 2001).
- **Repair costs** — for example, from the NRMA Insurance low-speed crash tests regularly published in CHOICE (March 2003 has the latest results).
- **Safety** — for example, from the ANCAP high-speed lab crash tests (last published in April 2003) and this real-life accident used car safety rating, both regularly published in CHOICE.
- **Fuel efficiency** — for example, from the Fuel Efficiency Guide published by the Australian Greenhouse Office (see its website at www.greenhouse.gov.au/transport/fuelguide).
- **Take a look at www.CHOICEextra.com.au**: To save you searching through your back copies, for a limited time it'll give you access to our reliability, repair costs and ANCAP safety data.

IN A NUTSHELL

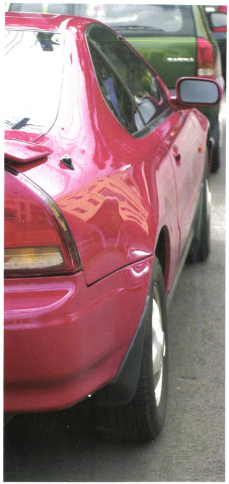
- **The ratings are based** *on real-life accidents.*
- **Ideally, look for a model** *that offers good protection for you and for other drivers in an accident.*

DRIVELINES

USED CAR SAFETY

Make and model; year of manufacture (in order of crashworthiness within groups, alphabetically when equal)	1 Crashworthiness	2 Aggressivity
SMALL CARS		
HOLDEN Astra TR 1996–98	✓	o
TOYOTA Corolla 1998–2000	✓	na
ALFA ROMEO 33 1983–92	o	na
DAEWOO 1.5i 1994–95	o	na
DAEWOO Cielo 1995–97	o	o
DAEWOO Lanos 1997–2000	o	o
DAIHATSU Applause 1989–99	o	o
FORD Laser 1991–94	o	o
FORD Laser 1995–98	o	o
HOLDEN Barina SB 1995–2000	o	o
HOLDEN Nova 1989–93	o	✓
HOLDEN Nova 1994–96	o	✓
HONDA Civic 1982–83	o	na
HONDA Civic 1992–95	o	o
HONDA Civic 1996–2000	o	✓
HONDA Concerto 1988–93	o	na
HYUNDAI Lantra 1991–95	o	o
HYUNDAI Lantra 1996–2000	o	o
HYUNDAI S Coupe 1990–96	o	na
MAZDA 121 1994–96	o	o
MAZDA 121 Metro 1997–2000	o	na
MAZDA 323 1990–93	o	✓✓
MAZDA 323 1995–98	o	o
MITSUBISHI Cordia 1982–89	o	o
MITSUBISHI Lancer CA 1988–90	o	✓
MITSUBISHI Lancer CC 1993–95	o	✓
MITSUBISHI Lancer CE 1996–2000	o	o
MITSUBISHI Mirage 1996–2000	o	o
NISSAN Pulsar 1992–95	o	o
ROVER Quintet 1982–86	o	na
SUBARU Impreza 1993–2000	o	o
SUZUKI Baleno 1995–2000	o	na
TOYOTA Corolla 1989–93	o	✓
TOYOTA Corolla 1994–98	o	✓
TOYOTA Starlet 1996–99	o	o
TOYOTA Tercel 1983–88	o	na
VW Golf 1995–98	o	na
FORD Laser 1982–88	✗	✓✓
HOLDEN Astra 1988–90	✗	o
HOLDEN Barina 1989–93	✗	✓✓
HOLDEN Gemini 1982–84	✗	✓
HOLDEN Gemini RB 1986–87	✗	o
HONDA Civic 1988–91	✗	o
HYUNDAI Excel 1990–94	✗	✓
HYUNDAI Excel 1995–2000	✗	o
MAZDA 323 1982–88	✗	✓✓
MITSUBISHI Colt 1982–88	✗	✓
NISSAN Micra 1995–97	✗	na
NISSAN Pulsar 1996–99	✗	o
NISSAN Pulsar/Vector 1988–90	✗	o
SUZUKI Swift 1989–99	✗	✓✓
TOYOTA Corolla 1982–84	✗	✓✓
TOYOTA Corolla 1986–88	✗	✓
DAIHATSU Charade 1982–86	✗✗	o
DAIHATSU Charade 1988–92	✗✗	✓
DAIHATSU Charade 1993–2000	✗✗	✓
DAIHATSU Mira 1990–96	✗✗	na
FORD Festiva WA 1991–93	✗✗	✓
FORD Festiva WB/WD/WF/WH 1994–2000	✗✗	o
HOLDEN Astra 1984–86	✗✗	✓
HOLDEN Barina 1985–88	✗✗	o
HONDA City 1983–86	✗✗	na
HONDA Civic 1984–87	✗✗	o
HYUNDAI Excel 1982–89	✗✗	o
MAZDA 121 1987–90	✗✗	✓
NISSAN Pulsar/Vector 1984–86	✗✗	✓
SUBARU Sherpa/Fiori 1989–92	✗✗	na
SUZUKI Hatch 1982–85	✗✗	na
SUZUKI Swift 1985–88	✗✗	o
MEDIUM CARS		
FORD Mondeo 1995–2000	✓	o
FORD Telstar 1988–91	✓	✗
HOLDEN Apollo JK/JL 1989–92	✓	o
MAZDA 626/MX6 1988–91	✓	✗
NISSAN Bluebird 1993–97	✓	na
PEUGEOT 505 1982–93	✓	na
SUBARU Liberty 1989–94	✓	o
TOYOTA Camry 1988–92	✓	o
DAEWOO Espero 1995–97	o	na
DAEWOO Nubira 1997–2000	o	o
FORD Corsair 1989–92	o	o
FORD Telstar 1983–86	o	o
FORD Telstar 1992–97	o	o
HOLDEN Vectra 1997–2000	o	o
MAZDA 626/MX6 1983–86	o	o
MAZDA 626/MX6 1992–97	o	o
MITSUBISHI Galant 1989–96	o	o
MITSUBISHI Nimbus 1984–91	o	na
MITSUBISHI Nimbus 1992–98	o	na
MITSUBISHI Sigma/Scorpion 1982–86	o	✓
NISSAN Gazelle 1984–88	o	na
NISSAN Pintara 1986–88	o	o
NISSAN Pintara 1989–92	o	o
NISSAN Prairie 1984–86	o	na
NISSAN Stanza 1982–83	o	na
PEUGEOT 405 1989–97	o	na
SUBARU 1800/Leone 1982–95	o	✓
SUBARU Liberty 1995–98	o	o
TOYOTA Camry 1983–86	o	o
TOYOTA Corona 1982–87	o	o
HOLDEN Camira 1982–89	✗	✓
NISSAN Bluebird 1982–86	✗	o
LARGE CARS		
FORD Falcon AU 1998–2000	✓✓	o
FORD Falcon EF/EL 1994–98	✓✓	o
HOLDEN Commodore VR/VS 1993–97	✓✓	o
HOLDEN Commodore VT/VX 1997–2000	✓✓	o
MITSUBISHI Magna TR/TS 1991–96	✓✓	o
MITSUBISHI Verada KR/KS 1991–96	✓✓	o
TOYOTA Lexcen 1993–97	✓✓	o
FORD Falcon EA/EB Series I 1988–Mar 92	✓	✗
FORD Falcon EB Series II/ED Apr 1992–94	✓	✗
FORD Falcon XE/XF 1982–88	✓	✗
HOLDEN Apollo JM/JP 1993–97	✓	o
HOLDEN Commodore VN/VP 1989–93	✓	o
MITSUBISHI Magna TE/TF/TH/TJ 1996–2000	✓	o
MITSUBISHI Magna TM/TN/TP 1985–90	✓	o
MITSUBISHI Verada KE/KF/KH/KJ 1996–2000	✓	o
TOYOTA Camry 1993–97	✓	o
TOYOTA Lexcen 1989–93	✓	o
HOLDEN Commodore VB-VL 1982–88	o	✗
HYUNDAI Sonata 1989–97	o	o
NISSAN Skyline 1982–90	o	o
TOYOTA Camry 1998–2000	o	o
COMMERCIAL VEHICLES		
FORD Falcon Panel Van 1982–95	✓	o
FORD Falcon Ute 1982–95	✓	✗
FORD Falcon Ute 1996–99	✓	✗
HOLDEN Rodeo 1996–98	✓	o
HOLDEN Rodeo 1999–2000	✓	o
NISSAN Navara 1992–96	✓	o
NISSAN XFN Ute 1988–90	✓	✗
VW Caravelle 1988–2000	✓	✗✗
VW Transporter 1988–2000	✓	✗✗
FORD F-Series 1982–92	o	✗✗
FORD Transit 1994–2000	o	o
HOLDEN Commodore Ute VG/VP 1990–93	o	o
HOLDEN Commodore Ute VR/VS 1994–2000	o	✗
HOLDEN Rodeo 1982–85	o	o
HOLDEN Rodeo 1986–88	o	na
HOLDEN Rodeo 1989–95	o	✗✗
HONDA Acty 1983–86	o	na
NISSAN 720 Ute 1982–85	o	o
NISSAN Navara 1986–91	o	o
TOYOTA Hiace/Liteace 1987–89	o	o

TOYOTA Hiace/Liteace 1990–2000	o	o
HOLDEN Shuttle 1982–87	✗	na
HOLDEN WB Series 1982–85	✗	o
TOYOTA Hiace/Liteace 1982–86	✗	o
DAIHATSU Handivan 1982–90	✗✗	na
HOLDEN Scurry 1985–87	✗✗	na
SUBARU Brumby 1982–93	✗✗	o
SUZUKI Carry 1982–2000	✗✗	na
SUZUKI Mighty Boy 1985–88	✗✗	na
PASSENGER VANS		
TOYOTA Tarago 1991–99	✓	o
MITSUBISHI Starwagon 1995–2000	o	o
MITSUBISHI Starwagon 1987–94	✗	o
TOYOTA Tarago 1983–89	✗	o
MITSUBISHI Starwagon/L300 1982–86	✗✗	o
SPORTS CARS		
FORD Capri 1989–94	o	o
HONDA Integra 1986–88	o	na
HONDA Integra 1990–92	o	na
HONDA Prelude 1983–91	o	✓
HONDA Prelude 1992–96	o	o
MAZDA MX5 1989–97	o	na
MAZDA RX7 1982–85	o	na
NISSAN 200SX 1994–2000	o	na
NISSAN 300ZX 1986–97	o	na
NISSAN Exa 1987–91	o	na
RENAULT Fuego 1982–87	o	na
TOYOTA Celica 1981–85	o	o
TOYOTA Celica 1986–89	o	o
TOYOTA Celica 1990–93	o	o
TOYOTA Celica 1994–99	o	na
TOYOTA Paseo 1991–99	o	na
TOYOTA Supra 1982–90	o	✗✗
HONDA CRX 1987–91	✗	na
HYUNDAI Coupe 1996–2000	✗	na
NISSAN Exa 1983–86	✗	✗✗
NISSAN NX/NX-R 1991–96	✗✗	✗✗
LUXURY CARS		
FORD Fairlane / N / LTD D 1988–94	✓✓	o
SAAB 9000 1986–98	✓✓	na
VOLVO 700/900 Series 1984–92	✓✓	o
BMW 3 Series 1992–98	✓	o
BMW 5 Series 1982–88	✓	na
FORD Fairlane / N / LTD D 1995–98	✓	o
HONDA Accord 1986–90	✓	o
HONDA Accord 1991–93	✓	o
HONDA Legend 1986–95	✓	o
MERCEDES BENZ E-Class W124 1986–95	✓	o
TOYOTA Cressida 1989–93	✓	o
VOLVO 200 Series 1982–93	✓	o
VOLVO 850/S70/V70/C70 1992–2000	✓	o
BMW 3 Series 1982–91	o	o
BMW 5 Series 1989–95	o	na
FORD Fairlane / Z / LTD F 1982–87	o	o
HOLDEN Statesman / Caprice VQ 1990–93	o	o
HOLDEN Statesman / Caprice VR/VS 1994–98	o	o
HOLDEN Statesman / Caprice WB 1982–85	o	na
HONDA Accord 1982–85	o	o
HONDA Accord 1994–98	o	o
JAGUAR XJ6 1982–86	o	na
MAZDA 929 1982–90	o	o
MERCEDES BENZ C-Class W201 1987–94	o	na
MERCEDES BENZ C-Class W202 1995–2000	o	na
MERCEDES BENZ E-Class W123 1982–85	o	na
MERCEDES BENZ S-Class W126 1982–92	o	na
NISSAN Maxima 1990–94	o	na
NISSAN Maxima 1995–99	o	na
SAAB 900 Series 1982–93	o	na
TOYOTA Crown/Cressida 1982–85	o	✗
TOYOTA Crown/Cressida 1986–88	o	na
FOUR-WHEEL DRIVES		
FORD Maverick 1988–97	✓✓	✗✗
LAND ROVER Discovery 1991–2000	✓✓	na
LAND ROVER Range Rover 1982–94	✓✓	✗✗
MITSUBISHI Pajero 1992–99	✓✓	o
NISSAN Patrol 1988–97	✓✓	✗✗
HOLDEN Jackaroo 1982–91	✓	✗✗
JEEP Cherokee 1982–2000	✓	o
TOYOTA Hilux 1989–97	✓	o
TOYOTA Landcruiser 1990–97	✓	✗✗
TOYOTA Landcruiser 1998–2000	✓	✗✗
TOYOTA RAV4 1994–2000	✓	na
DAIHATSU Feroza 1989–97	o	o
HOLDEN Jackaroo 1992–97	o	na
HONDA CR-V 1997–2000	o	na
LADA Niva 1983–98	o	na
MITSUBISHI Pajero 1982–90	o	✗
NISSAN Pathfinder 1988–94	o	na
NISSAN Pathfinder 1995–2000	o	✗
NISSAN Patrol 1982–87	o	✗
NISSAN Patrol 1998–2000	o	✗✗
SUZUKI Vitara 1988–98	o	o
TOYOTA 4Runner/Hilux 1982–85	o	✗
TOYOTA 4Runner/Hilux 1986–88	o	o
TOYOTA Hilux 1998–2000	o	o
TOYOTA Landcruiser 1982–89	o	✗✗
DAIHATSU Rocky 1984–99	✗	na
HOLDEN Drover 1985–87	✗	✓
SUZUKI Sierra 1982–2000	✗	✓



1 Crashworthiness

This rating shows how well the car prevents serious injury to the driver in an accident, compared to the average of all the rated cars:

- ✓✓ Significantly better protection than average.
- ✓ Better protection than average.
- o Average protection.
- ✗ Worse protection than average.
- ✗✗ Significantly worse protection than average.

2 Aggressivity

This shows the injury risk the vehicle poses to the driver of another car in an accident, compared to the average of all the rated cars. Ideally, a car should protect not only its own occupants, but also those of other cars.

- ✓✓ Much better protection than average.
- ✓ Better protection than average.
- o Average protection.
- ✗ Worse protection than average.
- ✗✗ Much worse protection than average.
- na No rating possible — insufficient data.

When car years are missing from the table it's because there was insufficient data for them. This can happen in particular if a model changed partway through a year.

Fancy a COLDIE?

Our expert panel drank their way through 44 premium beers to help you choose your poison.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Our expert tasters** *came up with a CHOICE six-pack of top-rating beers in a variety of styles (see page 25).*
- **Freshness is vital** *to beer quality — check the dates when you buy (see* Buying tips, *far right).*
- **UV light — including sunlight** *— can badly affect beer: don't buy it if it's been stored in bright light, and keep it somewhere cool and dark (the fridge springs to mind) at home.*

Move over, all you chardonnay-sipping sophisticates — the beer drinker's day is here. Gone is the image of the thong-wearing Ocker with beer gut and Stubbies. Now you can go to the neighbourhood barbie with your latest premium beer in tow and be seen as cutting edge, no less.

While sales of regular beer are flat, the premium beer sector is on the rise: it's doubled its size in the past four years and now accounts for about 7.5% of beer sales. The time is ripe to take a look at the 'premium' beer market and separate the flat from the frothy, so to speak.

SO WHAT'S PREMIUM?

We started with a list of practically every beer that's available at mainstream bottle shops, and from there started our cull based on price (because, let's face it, expensive beer is what the average punter sees as 'premium', even if it's not premium quality). This left us with beers that were more expensive than the average. From this list we chose primarily those that were widely available.

However, we also included some of the cheaper or less available ones to broaden the field. Because some brands come in multiple types (lager, ale, etc) we limited our list to one or two types per brand to keep the numbers manageable. And we added a handful of regular top-selling beers for comparison.

FRESH IS BEST

Beer is best fresh from the brewery. It doesn't improve with age (with a few exceptions — some Belgian-style beers like being aged) and over time loses flavour. It's also pretty sensitive to light and heat. When exposed to UV light, including sunlight, it can develop a condition known as light strike, resulting in a strong sulphur (rubbery or burnt) character. This can happen in as little as 30 minutes in bright sunlight.

Because freshness is such a critical factor with beer we aimed to get all beer for our tasting at less than three months old to ensure a fair comparison. We asked manufacturers and importers to provide us with the beer or to direct us to a retail outlet where we could get it. We ended up with all beers no older than around four months.

AND THE WINNERS ARE ...

The table on page 25 reveals all. If a cool, cleansing lager's what you're after there are plenty to choose from, with **HEINEKEN** coming out top, closely followed by **SINGHA**. **JAMES SQUIRE Original Pilsener** and **STOCKADE Premium Lager** were the best of the pilsener-style beers tasted.

For ale, **LITTLE CREATURES Pale Ale** was the winner. And if you like wheat beer, **SCHÖFFERHOFER Hefeweizen** scored the highest.

If you're looking for value for money **HOLLANDIA** would have to be the winner. It only costs $10.50 for a six-pack — it's one of the cheaper ones we added for interest (it's even cheaper for a six-pack than all the top-selling regular beers) and it still rated very well.

And it's nice to see that a number of the Aussie regulars held their own against the premium-priced beers. **HAHN Premium**, **VB** and **JAMES BOAG'S Premium** took the award here, on a par with the likes of **HOLLANDIA** and Italy's **NASTRO AZZURRO**.

WHAT DOES THE AVERAGE PUNTER THINK?

Something an expert picks up as being old or light-affected might still be perceived as good stuff by the average drinker. Experts can also put most of their

PHOTOS: ANTHONY SAWERS

personal preferences aside to judge on quality. We set out to see if some ordinary beer drinkers rated the same beers as highly as the gurus.

Because the non-experts couldn't possibly taste 48 beers, we gave them a manageable range of lagers to taste — ones that the expert panel though were particularly good or bad, plus a few 'mixed emotion' beers (beers the experts hadn't been able to agree on — see the table for details).

Sixteen people tasted 18 beers all up (including one beer twice, as a control). Perhaps predictably, among the non-experts beer preference was more a matter of individual taste. Each of the beers was liked by at least one of the tasters and disliked by others. On average, **SINGHA** and **HEINEKEN** weren't quite such a hit with the lay panel, and the top-scoring beers were Australian — **STOCKADE**, **JAMES SQUIRE** and **HAHN** — the first two of which did make it into our CHOICE six-pack based on the experts' ratings.

BUYING TIPS

- *Try to buy as fresh as possible. Most beers have a shelf-life of 9–12 months, so you can calculate from the best-before date (on the carton or bottle) approximately how old the beer is.*
- *Don't buy from the glass-fronted fridges in the bottle shop; the beer will almost certainly suffer some degree of light strike there. Go to the coolroom or the back of the fridge and take the freshest product you can find.*
- *And when you get it home, keep it cool and in the dark.*

From ale to lager

It's fascinating that with just a handful of basic ingredients, the result can be so many different styles of beer, depending on regional influences, brewing traditions and ingredient variation. You start off with water, malt (from barley), hops (for the bitter flavour) and yeast (it ferments the malt — and sometimes other sugars that are added — to form carbon dioxide and alcohol). The end product is beer.

All beer can be classed as either a **lager** or an **ale**. Which it is depends on the type of yeast used in the brew and the temperature at which fermentation takes place. Ale yeast is top-fermenting (it floats to the top of the fermentation tank), which allows for rapid fermentation — it only takes a few days — at warmer temperatures than for lager.

Ales are more complex and robust in aroma and taste than lagers and are generally darker in colour. They're also often fruitier and sweeter than lager. There are many kinds of ale, from pale and amber to dark and strong, and the category also includes wheat beer, stout and porter.

Lager is brewed with bottom-fermenting yeasts (they sink to the bottom of the tank) at much cooler temperatures than ale. It takes a week or more to ferment, and this is followed by a cold-storage period of from one to 12 weeks, depending on the style. (It's called 'lager' because that's the German word for 'store'.)

Lager has more subdued flavours than ale because of cold maturation. There's usually more emphasis on bitterness, with a less intense aroma than ales, and it's usually paler in colour. Lagers are generally thirst-quenchers.

One of the best-known lager styles is pilsener — with a very pronounced taste of hops.

THANKS TO THE PANEL

Thanks to our expert tasters, who did an outstanding job (from left to right).

- Olivier Massart, restaurateur, Belgian Beer Café, Sydney.
- Tim Penton, brewing manager, J Boag & Son.
- Rob Greig, Technical Manager, Australian International Beer Awards, University of Ballarat.
- Dave Edney, head brewer, Stockade Brewery.
- Willie Simpson, freelance journalist.
- Bill Taylor, chief brewer, Lion Nathan.

Beer tasting

Believe it or not there's more to appreciating beer than a hot day at the footy.

The glass: Glasses must be absolutely clean — scrub them (with dishwashing liquid), thoroughly rinse (detergent residues destroy the beer's head) and then air dry them. While there's a whole range of different glasses you can use, wide-mouthed ones highlight robust aromas (good for ales), while slim glasses promote foam and hold delicate aromas. The best glass for serious tasting is tulip-shaped: it concentrates the aroma and also makes it easier to swirl the beer around, releasing more of the aroma.

The temperature: Drink lager at about 4°C (normal fridge temperature) to let the flavour come through. Beer off the ice that's near to zero degrees will just numb your taste buds and reduce the flavour sensation. Ale needs to be drunk at slightly higher temperatures than lager to highlight the aroma and bring out the taste.

Pouring: Slosh some beer into the bottom of the glass to form a head. Then gently pour some beer into the foam to break any large bubbles and 'pack' the head. Leave it for around half a minute to age the foam, then tilt the glass and fill carefully. Straighten the glass as it fills and keep pouring until the head just froths over the rim of the glass.

Look: Your beer should look inviting. Hold the glass up to the light and look at the colour and clarity. Filtered beers should be bright and clear. Even yeasty beers (such as wheat beer) shouldn't be too cloudy. Most lager types should have a moderate head (about 2 cm high), which should collapse slowly and leave a lacing of foam on the glass as you drink it.

Sniff: Take two or three short sniffs to capture the aromas. As you drink, the aroma combines with the taste to create the total beer flavour. Some typical beer aromas include:

Estery: A fruity, sweet aroma coming from the yeast.

Hoppy: The hops can lead to a green, grassy, floral or tangy aroma (depending on the type of hops).

Malty: A sweet, floury or brewhouse aroma.

Caramel: Sometimes called burnt, it's the butterscotch or coffee character coming from roasted or caramelised malt.

Some smells that warn us of problems include:

Papery or cardboard: This comes from aged or oxidised beer.

Honey or buttery: Also called diacetyl flavour. Can happen through poor fermentation or bacterial infection.

Skunky or sulphury: Light-affected beers give off this aroma.

Taste: Sip the beer and let it wash over your tongue before swallowing. Often you'll taste a bitterness (from hops) and a sweetness (from malt or other sugars). Feel how 'full' the beer tastes on the palate — beers range from watery to heavy-bodied. Is it creamy and

Serving the beer at CHOICE's taste test.

Beer (from highest to lowest score within types)	1 Score out of 20	Alc / vol (%)	Bottle size (mL)	Origin	2 Price per six-pack ($)
LAGER					
HEINEKEN	17	5.0	330	Holland	14.00–17.50
SINGHA	16.5	5.9	330	Thailand	13.95–17.50
GROLSCH Premium Lager	16	5.0	355	Holland	15.50–17.50
HAHN Premium	16	5.0	375	Australia	15.00–16.00
HOLLANDIA	16	5.0	330	Holland	10.50
JAMES BOAG'S Premium	16	5.0	375	Australia	14.00–16.00
NASTRO AZZURRO	16	5.2	330	Italy	15.00–18.00
VB	16	4.9	375	Australia	11.00–13.80
BUDWEISER	15.5	4.9	355	USA	17.00–18.00
CARLSBERG Beer	15.5	5.0	330	Denmark	16.00–17.50
CROWN LAGER	15.5	4.9	375	Australia	14.00–16.50
CASCADE Premium Lager	15.5	5.2	375	Australia	15.00–16.50
HOLSTEN Premium	15.5	5.0	330	Germany	14.00–17.50
TOOHEYS New	15.5	4.6	375	Australia	11.00–13.80
CARLSBERG Elephant Beer	15	7.2	330	Denmark	20.00
CARLTON Cold	15	4.7	375	Australia	11.00–13.80
CASTLEMAINE XXXX Gold Lager	15	3.5	375	Australia	11.00–13.00
MILLER Genuine Draft	15	4.7	355	USA	17.50–20.00
TOOHEYS Extra Dry	15	5.0	345	Australia	11.50–14.50
GÖSSER	14.5	5.2	330	Austria	15.00–16.00
STEINLAGER	14.5	5.0	330	NZ	13.00–15.80
TIGER	14.5	5.0	330	Singapore	15.00–17.50
CARLTON Draught	14	4.7	375	Australia	11.00–13.80
DAB Original	14	5.0	330	Germany	15.00–17.00
WARSTEINER	12.5	4.8	330	Germany	16.50–19.95
LAGER: MIXED EMOTIONS (see note 1, below right)					
BECK'S	13–18	5.0	330	Germany	16.00–17.70
ASAHI	11–17	5.0	330	Japan **(A)**	17.00–19.90
CORONA Extra	10–17	4.6	330	Mexico	17.00–18.50
LÖWENBRÄU Original	10–17	5.2	330	Germany	16.00
SAN MIGUEL Super Dry	10–16	4.8	330	Philippines	14.00–17.50
STELLA ARTOIS Premium Lager	10–16	5.2	330	Belgium	17.00–18.70
PILSENER / DARK LAGER					
JAMES SQUIRE Original Pilsener	16.5	5.0	345	Australia	15.00–17.70
STOCKADE Premium Lager	16.5	5.0	330	Australia	10.00–15.00 **(B)**
SAMUEL ADAMS Boston Lager	16	4.8	355	USA	17.80–19.00
HANSA Pils	14.5	4.8	500	Germany	14.00–17.00
PILSENER: MIXED EMOTIONS (see note 1)					
PILSNER URQUELL	11–17	4.4	330	Czech Republic	15.00–18.00
ALE					
LITTLE CREATURES Pale Ale	17	5.2	330	Australia	16.00–19.00
DUVEL	16	8.5	330	Belgium	31.20–35.00
HOEGAARDEN Grand Cru	16	8.7	330	Belgium	13.00–16.00 **(B)**
JAMES SQUIRE Original Amber Ale	16	5.0	345	Australia	15.00–16.60
NEWCASTLE Brown Ale	15.5	4.7	330	UK	16.50–17.50
CAFFREY'S Genuine Draught	14.5	4.2	440	UK	14.00–15.50 **(B)**
DE KONINCK	14	5.0	330	Belgium	24.00–25.00
COOPER'S Genuine Draft	13.5	4.9	375	Australia	14.00–16.00
THOMAS COOPER'S Finest Export	12.5	4.9	375	Australia	12.00–14.00
WHEAT BEER					
SCHÖFFERHOFER Hefeweizen	16.5	5.0	500	Germany	20.00–23.00
REDBACK Original	15	4.7	345	Australia	14.00–16.00
SCHÖFFERHOFER Kristallweizen	15	5.0	500	Germany	20.00–24.00

(A) *Brewed in Thailand.* **(B)** *Four-pack.*

THE CHOICE SIX-PACK

Heineken
Singha
James Squire Original Pilsener
Stockade Premium Lager
Little Creatures Pale Ale
Schöfferhofer Hefeweizen

This mix of lagers, pilseners, ale and wheat beer scored 16.5 or 17 out of 20 in our expert taste test, the highest scores achieved.

CHOICE BUDGET PICK

Hollandia — it costs $10.50 for a six-pack (the cheapest in the test) and scored 16 out of 20.

1 Score out of 20

This is the average score from the panel of five tasters. Scoring is based on the system used in the Australian International Beer Awards, with a few amendments.

We used a total of three points for appearance, six for aroma, eight for flavour and body, and three for technical quality. In the awards it's five for aroma, six for flavour and body, and three for style. Because what it smells and tastes like is more important to the average consumer than whether it's true to style, we awarded extra points for these attributes and non 2 for style.

Where the tasters' average score wasn't representative of the range of scores awarded to a particular beer, we've labelled it a 'mixed emotion' and printed it in the table with the score range. A 'mixed emotion' is worth a try: it means at least one taster gave it a pretty high score.

2 Price

This is the range of prices we found in a store survey in Sydney in June 2003.

Elegant ANKLES

Which brands are comfortable and still look good after a few wears?

IN A NUTSHELL

- **In the trial:** *20 brands of knee-highs ranging in price from just 60 cents to almost $7 a pair.*
- **About a third** *got the thumbs-up from our trialists, including one of the cheapest brands.*
- **Other findings:** *less than perfect durability and fit, especially for women with fuller figures, and poor quality control with some brands.*

If you like your ankles dressed silky and sheer when you're wearing pants, knee-highs can be the answer. They're available in a variety of weights, colours, textures and patterns. And with ever more women wearing trousers to work, their popularity is on the rise.

For this report we enlisted more than 180 CHOICE Home Testers to trial 20 brands of sheer black knee-highs in 'one size fits all'. They included some with special features such as graduated compression or a massaging or cushioned sole, which all made it into the *What to buy* list (see right).

THE VERDICT

Because of their generally delicate texture, knee-highs and pantyhose won't last like socks, but poor durability isn't the only problem we found. Of all the knee-highs in the trial (361 pairs):

- 35% lasted less than the five days of the trial, mainly because of holes and ladders.
- 33% didn't stay up very well, especially with taller or heavier wearers.
- 20% were too short and 10% too long for the trialists.
- 18% had leg bands that were too tight, leaving in some cases red, sometimes painful marks on the skin.
- 11% had minor though visible manufacturing faults when first opened, such as snags and pulls or uneven texture or colour.

But despite these problems, seven brands got the thumbs-up from the trialists — one was rated 'very good' and six 'good'. They're profiled on the right.

What to buy

Profiles are of the knee-highs in the *What to buy* list. Prices are what we paid in March 2003 for one pair — some brands are sold in packs of more. Denier indicates the fineness of the yarn — the lower the number, the sheerer the fabric. Elastane is a rubber-like synthetic fibre added to nylon hosiery for better comfort, fit, appearance and durability.

KOLOTEX SHEER RELIEF SUPPORT

Rating: Very good
Price: $4.43
Details: 20 denier, 11% elastane, reinforced toe, heel and sole, graduated compression.

MAJOR POINTS

- None of the 19 pairs in the trial had an obvious manufacturing fault.
- Nearly all trialists found the length just right.
- Stayed up well.
- Four (out of 19) trialists found the leg band too tight.

TRIALISTS' COMMENTS

- "They were still going strong — I couldn't find any fault with them."
- "They'd obviously last a long time, but I didn't like the thickness — it looked like I was wearing socks."

HILTON SILKY SHEER

BEST BUY

Rating: Good
Price: $1.00
Details: 15 denier, 13% elastane, reinforced toe.

MAJOR POINTS

- Stayed up well.
- Comfort decreased noticeably from initial to last wear.
- Five (out of 19) trialists found them too long and five found the leg band too tight.

TRIALISTS' COMMENTS

- "Wonderful texture, so comfortable to wear — I was very impressed."
- "Got really good life out of them. Maybe by cutting off circulation (because of the too tight leg band) they'll outlive me?"

ITALIA STATEMENT FOOT MASSAGE

Rating: Good
Price: $5.99 (Kmart).
Details: 15 denier, 12% elastane, reinforced toe and heel, massaging sole.

MAJOR POINTS

- Stayed up well.
- Seven (out of 20) trialists found them too short.

TRIALISTS' COMMENTS

- "Even though two holes appeared on the first day, I'd still rate them as very good because of their comfort."
- "A very comfortable pair — no wrinkling even after a number of washes."

KAYSER RESILIENCE

Rating: Good
Price: $3.95
Details: 20 denier, 8% elastane, reinforced toe.

MAJOR POINTS

- Stayed up well.
- Appearance decreased noticeably from initial to last wear.
- Four of the 20 pairs in the trial had an obvious manufacturing fault on opening the packet.

TRIALISTS' COMMENTS

- "If they hadn't split and laddered I would have rated them far better because of the way they feel."
- "Very comfortable — the snags that developed wouldn't be an impediment to continued wear."

LEVANTE ULTRA SHEER

Rating: Good
Price: $3.48
Details: 10 denier, 5% elastane, reinforced toe.

MAJOR POINTS

- Stayed up very well.
- Comfort and appearance decreased noticeably from initial to last wear.
- Five (out of 17) trialists found them too long, three too short.

TRIALISTS' COMMENTS

- "Apart from the couple of snags on day one, these were very comfortable and looked great."
- "They felt nice to wear, but unfortunately aren't designed for the shorter person with small feet."

RAZZAMATAZZ SILKY SUPPORT

Rating: Good
Price: $3.97
Details: 20 denier, 16% elastane, reinforced toe, graduated compression.

MAJOR POINTS

- None of the 19 pairs in the trial had an obvious manufacturing fault.
- Stayed up well.
- Six (out of 18) trialists found the leg band too tight.

TRIALISTS' COMMENTS

- "These were excellent except for minor shrinkage."
- "The unusual knee band was very comfortable. Not only did it work, but it overcame the 'cutting' feeling one often gets with thinner bands."

TARGET CUSHION FOOT

Rating: Good
Price: $6.35
Details: 20 denier, 12% elastane, reinforced toe and heel, massaging sole.

MAJOR POINTS

- None of the 17 pairs in the trial had an obvious manufacturing fault.
- Stayed up well.
- Four (out of 17) trialists found the leg band too tight.

TRIALISTS' COMMENTS

- "I've never worn such comfortable knee-highs. The padded section won't suit shoes that are too open, but that's no problem."
- "Very thick, nice quality and, most importantly, hard wearing — would definitely buy them."

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW JONES

MARK TREMLETT

CHOICE HOME TESTER The trial

Our thanks go to the 181 CHOICE Home Testers who participated in the trial. They received two pairs of knee-highs in clear plastic bags so as not to be influenced by brand names.

At least 16 trialists tried each product. They wore (and washed) each pair for five days, or until they could no longer be worn, whichever came first. They checked them for obvious manufacturing faults on opening and rated them on appearance and comfort when they first put them on and after the last day's wear, when they also rated them for durability.

The trialists also gave an overall rating, in which they also considered other aspects they hadn't commented on elsewhere, such as size, staying up and the leg band. If one or more of these was unsatisfactory, they tended to give a lower overall rating, which explains why some brands are rated lower overall, despite good individual ratings.

* *See The trial, above, for more on the ratings.*

** *Prices are what we paid in March 2003 for one pair – some brands are sold in packs of more, as indicated.*

Brand and type (alphabetical when equal)	Overall rating*	Appearance rating*	Comfort rating*	Durability rating*	Price ($)**
KOLOTEX Sheer Relief Support	Very good	Good	Good	Very good	4.43
HILTON Silky Sheer (5 pairs)	Good	Good	Good	Very good	1.00
ITALIA Statement Foot Massage (KMart)	Good	Good	Good	Good	5.99
KAYSER Resilience	Good	Good	Good	Good	3.95
LEVANTE Ultra Sheer (2 pairs)	Good	Good	Good	Good	3.48
RAZZAMATAZZ Silky Support	Good	Good	Good	Good	3.97
TARGET Cushion Foot	Good	Good	Good	Very good	6.35
AMBRA Sheer (3 pairs)	OK	Good	Good	Good	2.32
CLASSIC ESSENTIALS (2 pairs) (Woolworths)	OK	OK	Good	Good	1.15
ITALIA Essential Ultra Silk (2 pairs) (KMart)	OK	OK	Good	Good	2.75
KAYSER 101	OK	Good	Good	Good	3.75
KOLOTEX Kicks (2 pairs)	OK	OK	Good	Good	1.30
LEVANTE Solare with Sheer Toe	OK	Good	Good	OK	6.95
RAZZAMATAZZ Sheer Nylon (2 pairs)	OK	Good	Good	Good	1.14
REDE Minirede Sheer (2 pairs)	OK	Good	Good	Good	3.82
SCHIAPARELLI Paparazzi Silky Sheer Matt	OK	OK	Good	Good	5.95
TARGET (4 pairs)	OK	Good	Good	Good	0.59
THE PRIVATE COLLECTION Sheer (2 pairs) (David Jones)	OK	Good	Good	Good	3.48
ULTIMATES (2 pairs) (Coles)	Borderline	OK	Good	OK	1.22
VOODOO Ultra Sheer (2 pairs)	Borderline	Good	OK	OK	3.48

ONE SIZE FITS ALL?

The women in our trial with above average weight, height and foot size had more problems with their knee-highs fitting, lasting and staying up. Knee-highs for fuller figures are available from some brands.

Muffins — not such a healthy choice

Muffins are often wrongly believed to be a healthy alternative to cakes — and they may have been once when they less resembled cakes. These days what's mostly on offer is anything but healthy. One large blueberry muffin can set you back 2500 kilojoules, not to mention 27 g of fat, five of them saturated — much the same as a piece of plain cake the same size. Save them for a treat.

ANTHONY AMIES

TOO HOT TO HANDLE?

Does your favourite curry have you reaching for a glass of water to cool your mouth down? Unfortunately water won't be much help, as capsaicin, which is the component of chilli that burns, binds to your taste buds and isn't dissolved by water. The fat and protein in milk, however, do help remove capsaicin from your mouth, so reach for a glass of milk instead, or have some natural yoghurt on the side.

Reality bites

Hot on the heels of the genetically modified (GM) food debate is another biotechnological quandary for you to consider.

Since the birth of Dolly the sheep a few years ago, the production of cloned animals has taken off. The benefits of cloning, according to the cloning companies, include safer and better-quality meat and milk, fewer unwanted animals and environmental benefits from fewer livestock.

For the time being the technology's still in early experimental stages, and success rates of cloning are only around 4% at best. For this reason it's a very expensive technology. Despite this, the reality is that in less than 10 years we could expect to see food products from cloned animals on our supermarket shelves.

Safety is an unknown quantity at this stage, plus it's yet to be conclusively established whether food from cloned animals is nutritionally and compositionally the same as the animal the genetic material came from, but at this stage it's looking as though it may well be. However, animal welfare and other ethical issues also need to be addressed.

It's quite a hot topic in the US, where discussions about whether the industry needs to be regulated are heating up. Current murmurings are that if it can be proven to be safe, the US Food and Drug Administration may not require cloned foods to be labelled. This is no surprise, given that it also doesn't require labelling of GM foods.

So what's happening in Australia? Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), the body that regulates and determines food policy, is in the process of conducting its own scientific review. That report is due to go before the FSANZ board later this month.

As with GM foods, CHOICE thinks consumers are entitled to know the source of their food and to make an informed choice, so at the very least we'd be pushing for food from cloned animals to be labelled. And as with GM foods, that could be quite a battle. We'll keep you updated on any developments.

IS YOUR HOME making

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Despite our 'outdoors'** *image, Australians may spend 90% or more of our time indoors, where air pollution levels can be worse than outdoors.*
- **Our increased efforts** *to make our homes energy-efficient can have harmful health effects.*
- **Unflued gas appliances** *are major contributors to indoor air pollution.*
- **Many products we use** *in our homes emit harmful air pollutants.*

You can get it heating your house or cleaning it, pulling out old structures or adding new ones — you can even get it cooking a meal … and we're not talking of thirst. But the sources of indoor air pollution are just about as varied.

We all know that smoking indoors will damage not only your own health but also that of every other household member. But did you know that heating your home with an unflued gas heater could expose you to high levels of dangerous air pollutants? That adhesives and sealants used in many pressed-wood products could emit pollutants for years to come? And that many commonly used cleaning products and toiletries could give off a cocktail of air toxics?

HOW BAD IS THE AIR?

Indoor air pollution is increasingly recognised as one of the top five public health problems. In Australia, the CSIRO estimates it could cost us approximately $10 billion a year in health costs and lost production. This figure is only estimated because there's little data available so far on the level of pollutants in Australian homes and the number of people affected.

Indoor air quality is expensive and difficult to measure — pollution levels can vary from time to time, from house to house, or even from one room to the next. But studies so far have established that some air pollutants are generally much more highly concentrated indoors than outdoors, particularly in new and newly renovated buildings, mobile homes, houses heated with unflued gas appliances, and in households where people smoke.

HEALTH EFFECTS

Just as varied as the range of potential indoor air pollutants are their health effects. Symptoms can be mild and non-specific such as headaches,

...you sick?

Indoor air pollutants lurk everywhere. Find out here about the sources in your home and what you can do to reduce your risk.

tiredness or lethargy; similar to colds and flu such as irritated eyes, nose or throat; or more severe such as aggravation of asthma or allergic responses. They can even lead to respiratory diseases, cancer or death.

Not all pollutants' health effects are well known, and even less is known about their cumulative effects or how they'll compromise your health if you're constantly exposed. People who are generally more sensitive to air pollutants include newborns and young children, elderly people, heart patients, people with bronchitis, asthma, hay fever or emphysema, and smokers. Some effects may show up soon after a single exposure, others only after years. The sections on individual air pollutants, pages 32–35, list some specific health effects.

Most homes have many sources of potential indoor air pollutants (see Figure 1, page 33). Whether they'll affect your health — and if so, to what degree — depends on many factors: the type of pollutant and level of exposure, your personal sensitivities, age and pre-existing medical conditions and, of course, the level of ventilation inside your home.

TACKLING THE PROBLEM

Except for the few cases where outdoor air pollutants cause problems indoors (say from car emissions if you live near a busy road), opening windows regularly can greatly improve the air quality inside. Good ventilation prevents air pollutants from building up and pushes them out of the room.

In some situations it may be best to leave windows open for most of the time you're inside; in others, when you want a fast exchange of air, creating a draught by fully opening windows and/or doors for a few minutes might work best. Ventilating this way when you're heating wastes less energy than leaving a window ajar all the time. Which leads us to the downside of ventilation: wasting energy.

To minimise our energy consumption and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, our efforts have concentrated in the past few decades on making houses more energy-efficient — at the expense of indoor air quality, it now transpires. The challenge now is to find ways of ensuring good indoor air quality while maintaining energy efficiency.

In Australia, no central authority is responsible for indoor air — national, enforceable standards only apply to workplace and outdoor air environments. But Commonwealth and state and territory governments are working with organisations such as the CSIRO, NHMRC, Standards Australia and the Gas Association to formalise regulations to improve indoor air quality.

Control at the source is generally seen as the most important strategy for achieving it. A few voluntary industry initiatives have started tackling some of the problems with the development of lower-emission building products and gas heaters. On the following pages you can read more about these — and find lots of advice on how you can reduce your exposure to the most common air pollutants inside the home.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ...

Contact the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing for a copy of Healthy Homes: a guide to indoor air quality in the home for buyers, builders and renovators, *or download it at http://enhealth.nphp.gov.au/council/pubs/pdf/healthyhomes.pdf.*

FINDING THE PROBLEM

If you think the air quality in your home is affecting your health but you can't pinpoint the source, the CSIRO can assess your indoor air for a cost of $1500–$3500 upwards. Contact the business development manager at cameron.begley@csiro.au or phone (03) 9252 6073.

Heating and cooking

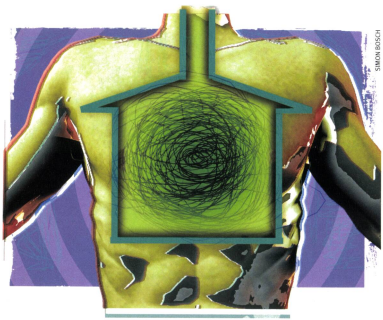
Heating with natural gas is popular in Australia. It's widely available, comparatively cheap and valued for its lower impact on the environment — it emits far less of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide than most of the electricity produced for heating. But unflued gas appliances can also be a major source of indoor air pollution.

UNFLUED GAS APPLIANCES

These appliances have no flue or chimney to vent combustion particles and gases to the outside. It's estimated around 600,000 Australian homes are heated with unflued gas heaters. So every winter, around two million people are potentially exposed to the two gas combustion pollutants of most concern: nitrogen dioxide and carbon monoxide.

- **Nitrogen dioxide** (NO_2) is a colourless and odourless gas that irritates the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose and throat and causes shortness of breath after exposure to high concentrations. Children and people with asthma and respiratory diseases are particularly at risk.
- **Carbon monoxide** (CO) is equally hard to detect. It reduces the blood's ability to carry oxygen to vital organs and is very poisonous at high levels. Symptoms of exposure include headache, tiredness, dizziness, nausea, confusion and shortness of breath. Exposure to high levels can even lead to death within minutes. Most susceptible are people with heart disease, smokers, young children and unborn babies.

Unflued gas heaters also release **water vapour**, which can contribute significantly to mould problems in poorly ventilated homes — see *Moulds and fungi*, page 35, for more on this.



In good condition and properly used, unflued gas heaters only release small amounts of these pollutants, which aren't likely to affect your health. But levels can build up with insufficient ventilation or if the heater is faulty, inappropriately installed, not serviced regularly or just old.

Older (pre-1990s) heaters are more likely to produce higher levels of nitrogen oxides (NO_x) than newer ones that comply with pollutant emission limits set in the late 1980s. However, health and scientific experts still doubt that all associated health problems have been solved with these lower limits.

CSIRO tests of some new low-emission heaters found that some, while conforming to the Australian standard, still had NO_x emissions about three times above the (lower) limit set by the World Health Organization. And those with low NO_x emissions also released relatively high levels of formaldehyde.

In Victoria in 2000, five people died from CO poisoning from a gas heater: three in a caravan heated with an unflued gas heater and two in a room whose flued gas heater had a leaking flue. Two studies (one looking at unflued gas heating in homes, the other in schools) found that where there were higher levels of NO_2, there were higher incidences of, respectively, asthma symptoms, and colds and sore throats.

SOLID FUEL HEATING

Respirable suspended particles (fine particles, for short) are very small particles that almost behave like a gas you can inhale deep into your lungs. Depending on their type, size and your length of exposure, they can cause ill health or, in extreme cases, death.

The major sources of fine particles indoors are wood and kerosene heaters and environmental tobacco smoke. They can escape from poorly installed or badly maintained solid fuel heaters, from leaks in the flue or from opening the heater door for refuelling.

In Australia, a study found particularly high levels of fine particles in households where people smoked and where solid fuel was used for heating.

FOR CLEANER INDOOR AIR

- Ensure good ventilation whenever you use an unflued gas heater.
- In some states, you can only install an unflued gas heater if it and your room space meet certain conditions — check with your local gas supplier.
- Don't use it in a confined space for long periods of time and never in a small room such as a bedroom, bathroom or caravan.
- Don't use it if it releases a strange smell or if it gives you uncharacteristic headaches or nausea.
- Have it serviced at least every two years.

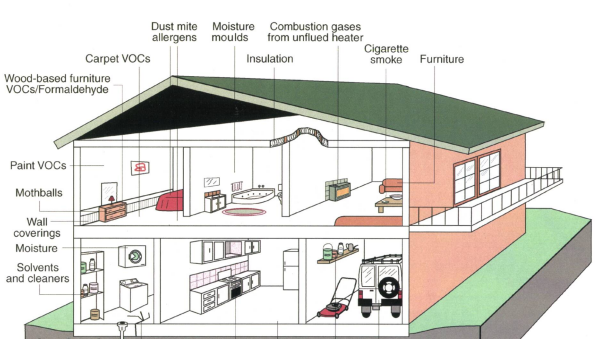


Figure 1. Sources of potential indoor air pollution. (Diagram courtesy CSIRO.)

- Turn an unflued gas heater off while you're using a gas cooker in the same room (and don't use a gas cooker to heat a room), otherwise the gas combustion pollutants can build up to well above 'safe' levels. Use a rangehood that's vented outside or open a window while cooking.
- If you notice a persistent yellow-tipped flame on your gas stove, it could be releasing higher pollutant emissions. Ask your gas provider, plumber or gasfitter to adjust the burner so the flame is blue.
- Carbon monoxide levels can also pose problems indoors if your garage is attached to the house. So keep the connecting door closed when you leave and arrive with the car, and never leave the car (or a petrol lawnmower) running inside the garage.

Smoking

Environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) is a major contributor to indoor air pollution. It's a mixture of gases and fine particles containing around 4000 chemicals, including 43 that are known to cause serious health problems, including cancer, in humans. Some of the air pollutants in ETS include carbon monoxide, formaldehyde, respirable suspended particles and nitrogen dioxide.

ETS causes eye, nose and throat irritation and may affect the cardiovascular system. Babies and children and anyone with asthma are particularly at risk of respiratory infections and irritation.

Smoking indoors can increase the level of respirable particles to more than 10 times the outdoor level. In Australia, the ban on smoking in public buildings should have reduced fine particle concentrations there, but it can still be a problem in private homes (see *Solid fuel heating*, far left).

FOR CLEANER INDOOR AIR

- Don't smoke indoors or let others do so.

Inside your home

If you're lucky enough to move into a brand-new home this year, put good ventilation at the top of your agenda, as many of the commonly used construction products can release air toxics in high concentrations — and many are likely to remain at high levels for weeks or months to come. Of most concern to human health are formaldehyde and volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

FORMALDEHYDE

This colourless, pungent-smelling gas is emitted by gas stoves and in tobacco smoke. But the most likely source for high levels indoors are common building products such as medium-density fibreboard (MDF),

BRI AND SBS

'Building-related illness' *is a clinically diagnosed illness directly related to exposure to indoor air pollutants — the symptoms can be traced to a specific pollutant in a building.*
'Sick building syndrome' *refers to a set of symptoms a number of people inside a particular building suffer chronically, which disappear when they're out of that building. These symptoms can't be traced to a specific pollutant.*

plywood and particleboard. The resins used in their manufacture can release formaldehyde gas for many years. Emissions usually decrease over time and are highest in new or newly renovated buildings.

Formaldehyde can irritate the eyes, nose, throat and lungs. It can cause cancer in animals and may cause it in humans. High exposure can cause breathing difficulties and trigger attacks in people with asthma.

In Australia, high formaldehyde levels have been found in mobile homes and caravans (which contain many pressed-wood products and can be poorly ventilated), and in buildings that had recently been insulated with urea-formaldehyde foam insulation (UFFI), but levels there decreased after several months when the foam had dried.

Australian-made 'low-emission' pressed-wood products are claimed to release less formaldehyde than some imported products. In one case, though, CSIRO tests found their emissions to be about twice as high as the European low-emission specifications.

VOLATILE ORGANIC COMPOUNDS (VOCS)

The term VOCs covers a great range of compounds, among them benzene, toluene, chlorofluorocarbons, halons, carbon tetrachloride and some pesticides. In any building you may find as many as 150 of these carbon-containing chemicals, which often have an odour and evaporate at room temperature.

Floor coverings such as carpets, tiles and polished wood (or the adhesives, varnishes and paints used to lay and seal them) often contain VOCs, as do cleaning fluids and polish, textile finishes, scents, sprays and tobacco smoke.

Only a few VOCs have been studied in detail and little is known about their cumulative health effects when mixed with other air pollutants. Many are known to cause cancer in animals and some to cause it in humans. Symptoms of excessive VOC exposure include eye, nose, throat and skin irritation, headache, vomiting, drowsiness, visual disorders and memory impairment.

In Australia a recent CSIRO study found higher indoor VOC levels in established buildings compared to outdoor levels, and very much higher levels in new homes.

LEAD AND ASBESTOS

Old homes can also harbour indoor air pollutants that can pose a health hazard when renovating. Lead and asbestos were both widely used building materials in the past — lead in paints (before 1970) and asbestos in products such as asbestos-cement sheets and roofing sheets, textured paint, vinyl floor tiles, pipe lagging and fire-resistant boards (before the mid 1980s).

Lead paint and asbestos-containing materials pose no danger when intact and left alone, but when disturbed or removed can release fine particles you can breathe in or swallow.

In the body, lead can harm virtually every system, particularly the brain, kidneys and reproductive organs. Children under four and unborn children are most vulnerable.

Because the health risks associated with asbestos exposure are well known (they include lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis), asbestos is no longer allowed in building products for the home and will be prohibited in all forms from December 31, 2003.

FOR CLEANER INDOOR AIR

- Ensure good ventilation after moving into a new or newly renovated home.
- Reduce the number of products you use that contain VOCs and choose low-emission alternatives whenever possible. For example, use flyscreens or mosquito nets rather than insect sprays. And if you must use indoor pesticides on a large scale, avoid spills, leave the building for a few hours afterwards and ventilate well.
- Limit your use of spray toiletries and strong-smelling cleaning products in non-ventilated areas.
- Before putting away dry-cleaned clothes, air them well outside or in a well-ventilated room you're not using.
- The same advice applies to new, freshly lacquered or oiled furniture than can emit VOCs, especially when individual pieces are packed airtight in the factory for you to assemble at home.
- Take special care when you strip old paint or clean walls with flaking paint that could contain lead. Contact your health department or lead advisory service for advice on how to remove it safely, or get a professional to do the job.
- Don't rip, cut, sand or remove asbestos-containing materials — your health department can give advice on sealing, enclosing or removing the source.
- Consider using materials that are by nature non-emitting, such as wood, bricks, glass, granite/stone, powder-coated or finished metals or stainless steel.
- Look for 'low-emission' pressed-wood products — the CSIRO has a list of useful websites you may want to consult if you're after low-emission products certified by overseas labelling schemes (go to www.cmit.csiro.au/innovation/2001-02/indoor_air.htm).
- Have joinery done without the use of solvents and caulking compounds.
- Finish surfaces with water-based or low-emission ('zero-VOC') coatings.

NEW CARS

Indoor air pollutants can also lurk in new cars, especially in the first six months after manufacture. When the CSIRO assessed three new cars from different manufacturers, it found very high VOC levels that could even pose a safety problem, as they can irritate the senses and impair performance and memory.

- Ensure good ventilation (open windows and use a fan) when painting.
- When buying a new carpet, ask the retailer for information about lower-emission carpets and underlay, and ask them to unroll and air it before it's laid. Ensure good ventilation afterwards.

Biological allergens

Biological allergens (allergy-causing substances) can cause health problems for the 20–40% of us who are sensitive to them. Allergic reactions occur only after repeated exposure to a specific biological allergen, so even if you haven't had problems in the past, you may suddenly become very sensitive to it. Most commonly present in our homes are house dustmites, pets, pollen, moulds and fungi.

HOUSE DUSTMITES, PETS AND POLLEN

Of most concern in the Australian context are house dustmites, given our high asthma rates. But other animal allergens (from cats, dogs, birds or even cockroaches) can also spell problems for some people.

The allergens are usually contained in the animal's droppings, saliva or dander (tiny skin scales that can become airborne when small particles dry and fall off). In people sensitive to them, inhaling these allergens can trigger a reaction in the lungs (asthma), nose (hay fever or allergic rhinitis) or skin (dermatitis or eczema).

And on warm days when you leave doors and windows open, the small airborne pollen grains most grasses, trees and shrubs release can cause similar reactions in people sensitive to these allergens.

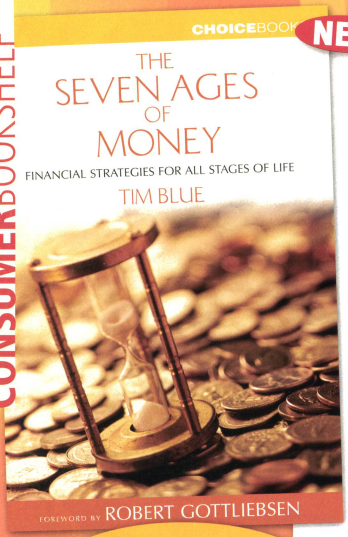
MOULDS AND FUNGI

These are fine, often invisible filaments whose spores become airborne and can be inhaled. Damp areas in the house (such as bathrooms, cellars and poorly ventilated rooms) are particularly susceptible to mould and fungal growth, as are water-damaged carpets and building materials. Unflued gas or kerosene heaters can also contribute to mould problems because of the water vapour they release.

In people sensitive to mould spores, inhaling them can cause various allergic reactions. Mould can also produce poisons known as mycotoxins which, when absorbed, can sometimes affect the nervous system. Some fungi can also infect various parts of the body, particularly the lungs and skin.

FOR CLEANER INDOOR AIR

- If you're allergic to dustmites, contact your local Asthma Foundation for comprehensive advice on how to reduce your exposure. Basic advice includes using bedding that can be washed in hot water and/or dustmite-proof covers, and avoiding furnishings and carpets that accumulate dust.
- Vent your clothes dryer and rangehood to the outside.
- When showering, bathing, cooking, washing or using a clothes dryer, open windows (or use an exhaust fan or rangehood) so the steam won't settle inside.
- Keep your house warm and dry.
- If you're sensitive to animal allergens but don't want to live without a pet, keep it out of living and sleeping areas.



NEW

"Read the book and get on with living."
— Robert Gottliebsen

THE SEVEN AGES OF MONEY

Financial strategies for all stages of life

TIM BLUE

FOREWORD BY ROBERT GOTTLIEBSEN

In the play *As You Like It* Shakespeare identified the seven ages of man. In the book *The Seven Ages of Money,* Tim Blue identifies the financial ages most of us will go through in our lives, including being young and single, part of a couple, a family and in our twilight years.

Following the advice in this book you can be financially independent at any age. For example, did you know that by saving $100 a week from 25 you could be a millionaire by 65?

The Seven Ages of Money answers questions like:

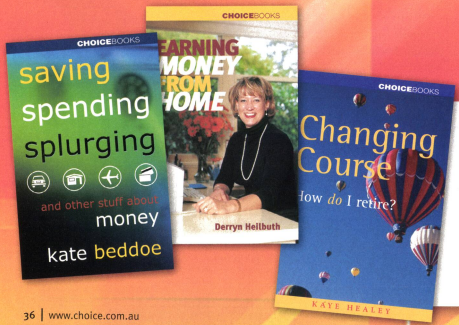
- How do I save for a car?
- What the heck is HECS?
- Do I need to budget for childcare?
- How much insurance is too much?
- When should I think about funeral expenses?

Our financial needs and expectations at 70 are not what they were at 17, or even 47, and this book offers advice for those in any of the seven ages.

ABOUT TIM BLUE

Tim is a finance journalist, radio commentator and TV presenter and producer with 30 years' experience. He currently works as the Business Surveys Editor at *The Australian*.

RRP $25 but from CHOICE $22.50
CODE: SAM



SAVING SPENDING SPLURGING

An informative book that supplies you with the tools you need to get your finances under control.

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Start and then run a prosperous home business.

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CHANGING COURSE

Prepare to change the course of your life when you retire.

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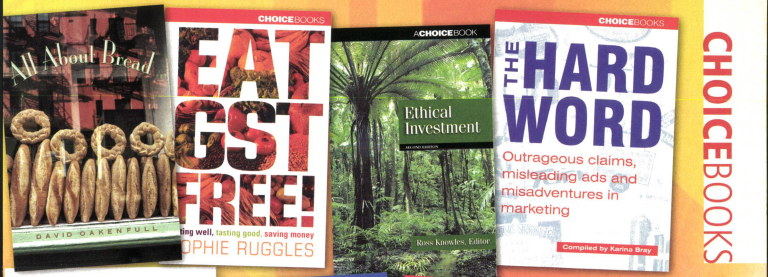

ALL ABOUT BREAD
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THE HARD WORD
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HOW TO START A SMALL BUSINESS *IN THE REAL WORLD*
CODE: SASB

NEGOTIATING WITH YOUR SCHOOL
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HEALTHY WOMEN
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WHAT *IS* THE MATTER WITH BOYS?
CODE: WTMB

YOUR HEALTH ORGANISER
CODE: YHO

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JOHN POSPISIL
CHOICE BOOKS
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A Practical Guide for Parents
David West
CHOICE BOOKS
Healthy WOMEN
GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT
Hazel EDWARDS
CHOICE BOOKS
SURVIVING SURVIVAL
Life After Cancer
"I have had numerous achievements since my cancer experience (academic success, successful job, public recognition, etc) and here I sit hardly able to put one foot in front of the other . . ."
Miles Little
Christopher Jordens
Kim Paul
Emma-Jane Sayers
CHOICE BOOKS
What IS the matter with boys?
Peter West
CHOICE BOOKS
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COLLEEN CARROLL + KERRIE MOORE

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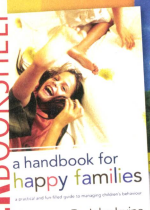

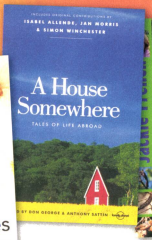

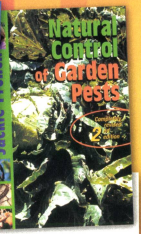

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From sleeping and sharing to hyperactivity and bullying, from peer pressure and coping with sex to drugs and alcohol, Dr John Irvine covers the family issues in his clear, witty and approachable style.

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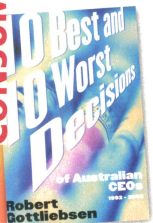

A HOUSE SOMEWHERE

This is a collection of wonderful pieces of contemporary travel writing. Even if you can't go you can dream, and *A House Somewhere* is a wonderful place to start.

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NATURAL CONTROL OF GARDEN PESTS

If you prefer to take a more natural approach to garden pests, Jackie French offers you a range of natural options for both repelling and killing insects.

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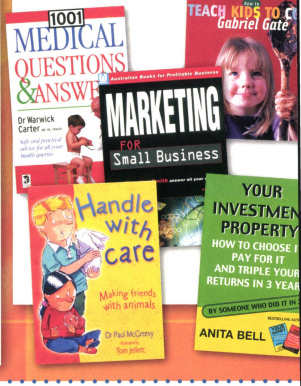

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Plain or fancy?

Do any of the new whiz-bang features make brushing your teeth less of a chore?

AUSTRALIAN PICTURE LIBRARY – IF

IN A NUTSHELL

You don't need *to pay more for a brush with all the bells and whistles — some of the more popular toothbrushes in our trial were plain and simple, and there's no independent evidence yet that any of the angles, curves or inlays are better for your teeth.*

These days, a toothbrush isn't just a toothbrush — you'll almost find more bells and whistles on some toothbrushes than your car. But do they really make a difference to how easy it is to clean your teeth? And do they make them more comfortable to use?

We put our Home Testers to work on 36 toothbrushes to find out. The trial included toothbrushes with angled bristles, bristles of varied heights, extended tips where the end bristles are longer, brushes with a flexible neck and head, and toothbrushes with a rubber inlay in the handle.

The trialists rated how comfortable the handle, head and bristles were, the ease of access to the teeth, how easy it was to manoeuvre and the overall comfort.

THE VERDICT

Some 'designer' toothbrushes were found more comfortable, but not all. Two in particular, the **REACH Squeeze**, which has a squeezable handle that moves the head and neck, and the **REACH Dual Effect**, which has rubber bristles around the edge of the head to massage the gums, didn't impress the trialists much.

Trialists also preferred angled over straight bristles and liked bristles of varied heights and a flexible neck. These features aided comfort, accessibility and manoeuvrability.

The majority of toothbrushes in the trial had a rubber inlay in the handle, ranging from a few strips of rubber around the thumb grip to the whole length of the handle. Trialists found it had a significant impact on the overall comfort of the toothbrushes, and rated the toothbrushes with it higher for handle comfort, accessibility and how easy they were to manoeuvre.

FROM THE EXPERTS

We asked the Australian Dental Association whether a toothbrush with any of the design features mentioned is better for your teeth and gums. Unfortunately not a lot of independent research has been conducted in this area. So follow your dentist's or dental hygienist's advice on brushing, and remember that more important than the choice of toothbrush is how you use it, how often you use it and what you eat.

There are some features to look for when choosing a toothbrush:

- The brush head should be small enough to reach your back teeth, particularly on the cheek side, without discomfort. A narrow head makes it easier to reach all your teeth. Smooth, rounded corners help avoid gum damage.
- Bristles should be soft and flexible so that they're less likely to damage gums and wear away the tooth surface.
- The handle should be easy to grip and manipulate. A fairly straight handle is preferable, as angles and curves may affect your control of the brush.

IT WON'T FIT IN THE TOOTHBRUSH HOLDER!

It's a minor point, but something many of our trialists find annoying: some toothbrushes these days have such thick handles they won't fit in a normal-sized toothbrush holder.

Models with noticeably thicker handles included the Colgate Active Angle, Colgate Active Flexible, Macleans Flex Top Max-Active and Cross Angled, Oral B Cross Action, Just Ess Rubber Grip, Reach Dual Effect and Reach Squeeze.

PROFILES

Trialists liked the six models profiled below best. Prices are the average we paid in February 2003.

REACH ACCESS

Price: $3.54

Comfortable, easy-to-grip handle. Massaging, flexible bristles and a manoeuvrable head.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

"This looked liked other brushes I've seen — fairly understated. But when I started brushing on the first day I thought 'wow' and still do!"

"I like this toothbrush. It feels good in your hand. The overall clean is very good, gets into all the nooks and crannies. Leaves my teeth feeling nice and clean."

COLGATE REPLACE

Price: $2.31 (this is the cost of one brush; the cost of the pack is higher because there's a spare head)

Light, comfortable, springy handle and a compact, flexible and manoeuvrable head. Gentle, flexible bristles.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

"It was a revelation to me that I was really enjoying brushing my teeth, which I usually consider a dull chore. All elements of the brush contribute to this — overall an excellent product."

"Just a nice toothbrush to use — features on the handle work well, good size overall. Big plus point is the replaceable head — it always seems so wasteful to throw a toothbrush out when only the bristles/head need replacing."

COLGATE ACTIVE FLEXIBLE

Price: $3.94

Easy-to-grip handle. Flexible, manoeuvrable head, and gentle, soft, flexible bristles.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

"Fantastic toothbrush. Will definitely use again."

"This is the Rolls-Royce of toothbrushes. Very nice to use."

COLGATE SENSATION CLEANING TIP

Price: $3.38

Flexible head.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

"An excellent, comfortable toothbrush to use."

"Head is at a good angle and bristles are very well positioned; perfect length; the top of the handle is a bit slippery while brushing but not uncomfortable. Almost perfect toothbrush if the top of the handle was slightly smaller."

MACLEANS FLEX

Price: $2.90

Comfortable, easy-to-grip handle. Flexible head, soft bristles.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

"Overall I was surprised it brushed so well considering it was just a plain, one-colour, same-bristles-throughout design."

"I liked this toothbrush as it was comfortable to use, soft and didn't hurt my gums while brushing with it."

ORAL B ADVANTAGE PLUS 35 COMPACT

Price: $4.63

Light, comfortable, easy-to-grip handle. Compact head.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

"My first thought of the head was that it was too small. After having used it, I found that it was a great size to get to all the areas of my teeth."

"An excellent toothbrush that can reach all hard-to-reach places while massaging the gums without being abrasive."

BEST BUYS

Trialists liked the following three brushes almost as much as the others profiled, and they're also pretty cheap. Most dentists recommend changing your toothbrush every two or three months, so if you're looking for a cheaper alternative these are the way to go.

COLES PERSONA

Price: $1.00 (twin-pack: this is the cost of one brush)

Light, springy handle. Flexible head and gentle bristles.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

"Very good toothbrush. Perfect and easy to use. I'll have it any time."

"Out of all toothbrushes I tested this was the only one that would also fit in my toothbrush holder. Although this would not be a deciding factor, it certainly was a bonus!"

BI-LO

Price: $0.98 (twin-pack; this is the cost of one brush)

Light, springy handle. Flexible, manoeuvrable head, soft bristles.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

"I think the handle style on this would suit anyone, any hand size. It's very light and flexible. Very pleased with this one."

"Bristles very well shaped and comfortable on the teeth and gums. Good grip on handle but thin."

DENTITEX MULTITUFT

Price: $1.00 (twin-pack; this is the cost of one brush)

Light, thin handle. Compact, small, streamlined head and soft, gentle bristles.

TRIALIST COMMENTS

"I found the pointed head very comfortable and easy to manoeuvre around the mouth."

"It would be perfect if the handle were thicker and not so flexible."

CHOICE HOME TESTER

The test

Thank you to the Home Testers who took part in this trial. We sent four different toothbrushes to 471 of them, and around 45 trialists tried each toothbrush. We sent trialists soft or medium bristles, depending on what they normally used, and excluded people who prefer hard bristles from the trial, as most dentists don't recommend them.

The trialists used each toothbrush twice a day for three days, and evaluated handle, bristle, head and overall comfort. We usually hide brand names, but were unable to with some toothbrushes without affecting the feel or grip of the handle, so trialists may have known which brands they were using.

TOOTHBRUSHES

Brand	Overall comfort score (%)	Price per brush ($)*
REACH Access	78	3.54
COLGATE Replace **(A)**	77	2.31 **(A)**
COLGATE Active Flexible	75	3.94
COLGATE Sensation Cleaning Tip	75	3.38
MACLEANS Flex	74	2.90
ORAL B Advantage Plus 35 Compact	74	4.63
COLES Persona (twin-pack)	73	1.00
BI-LO (twin-pack)	72	0.98
COLGATE Active Angle	72	4.86
COLGATE Total Professional	72	3.92
DENTITEX Multituft (twin-pack) (Aldi)	72	1.00
MACLEANS Flex Direct	72	3.48
ORAL B Indicator Plus 35 Compact (twin-pack)	72	3.24
REACH Ultra	72	2.99
MACLEANS Flex Top Max-Active	70	5.69
COLGATE Flexible	69	2.94
GLISTER (four-pack) (Amway)	69	5.86
ORAL B Cross Action 35 Compact	68	5.99
REACH Access Plus	67	3.81
MACLEANS Flex Top Max-Active Cross Angled	66	5.87
ORAL B Advantage 35 Compact	66	3.48
JUST ESS Clean Angle (three-pack)	65	1.31
ORAL B Indicator 35 Compact	65	2.91
REACH Between	65	3.13
JUST ESS Rubber Grip (twin-pack)	63	1.76
REACH Antibacterial	61	2.93
JUST ESS Clean 44 (three-pack)	57	1.21
WISDOM Five Star	57	1.99
COLGATE Plus Twister	56	2.98
WHITE GLO (B)	56	4.02
REACH Dual Effect	55	4.98
REACH Squeeze	55	3.98
COLES Persona (single-pack) **(C)**	54	1.74
HOME BRAND Premium	52	1.79
NO FRILLS Premium	52	1.78
TEK	42	1.81

* *Prices are the average of those we paid in February 2003. Where there's more than one brush in the pack it's noted.*

(A) *This toothbrush comes with a spare head, so the price per pack is double.*

(B) *Comes with a 'stain-lifter' tip; we didn't include it in the trial.*

(C) *This is a different toothbrush from those in the Coles twin-pack.*

In the WASH

Forty-six machines put through their paces.

IN A NUTSHELL

- Nine of the 13 *machines in the* What to buy *list are also Best Buys — good performers at a good price.*
- Some of the machines *tested are less than gentle on your clothes — see* Not so gentle, *right.*
- We've got some great *tips to save you money in the laundry — see page 44.*

Twelve new models were tested for this report. The remaining models are those tested over the past 12 months or so that are still available and have had no major changes that would affect performance.

Nothing's changed overall either — while front and top loaders have a similar range of dirt removal and spin efficiency scores, the front loaders still outperform the top loaders for water and energy efficiency and how gentle they are on your clothes.

NOT SO GENTLE

A gentle wash makes a real difference to the wear and tear on your clothes. They may well be clean, but you won't be happy if they're becoming frayed or stretched because the action of the machine is too severe.

To test this, we attach swatches of an easily frayed material to a garment in each load, and measure the area of the swatch before and after washing. The gentleness score is calculated based on the extent to which it's frayed.

Top-loading machines are generally more severe on clothes than front loaders, so while they're often cheaper upfront, you might want to take into account the cost of replacing clothes that wear out faster. Machines that scored particularly poorly for gentleness were the following:

- Worst were the **SIMPSON Encore 605 36S605K,** which scored just 40%, closely followed by the **FISHER & PAYKEL Intuitive Eco IW711** with 42%.
- The **FISHER & PAYKEL Pride, HOOVER 500MD, HOOVER 600MD, HOOVER 750LD** and **SIMPSON Esprit 550 36S550K** all scored less than 50%.

On the flipside, the front-loading **ARISTON Margherita 2000 AB95** was by far the gentlest on clothes of all the machines tested with a score of 82%.

We test gentleness on the 'normal' wash cycle, so if you have clothes that are more delicate and you have a machine that didn't score well for gentleness, try choosing the 'delicates' program.

DOING THE DIRTY

This group of 46 machines has some surprisingly low scores for the basic performance indicator: dirt removal. Five top loaders scored less than 65%: the **FISHER & PAYKEL Excellence GW511, NEC NW-452, SIMPSON Esprit 750** and the two **KLEENMAIDs.**

In fact the two newly tested **KLEENMAIDs** stood out as disappointing overall, scoring just 56% for dirt removal, 51% for spin efficiency (the lowest score for this) and 52% for water efficiency. However, they did have the highest score for gentleness of all the top loaders: 65%.

CHOICE SHOPPER

If you know the machine you want, CHOICE Shopper can help you find it at a good price. Just phone 1300 360 655 (9 am–5 pm, Monday to Friday) with the model details, a price you want to beat and your eight-digit subscriber number (it's above your name on the mailing label with the magazine).

What to look for

- **Anti-crease**: Some models have a permanent press or creasables cycle designed for easily creased or pleated fabrics. Others may have a feature that either won't drain the last rinse water or won't spin after the water is drained.
- **Out-of-balance correction**: Automatically detects and redistributes an out-of-balance load, either by spinning slowly before the full spin cycle or, as many top loaders do, by taking in extra water to wet and move the clothes before spinning again. If you're trying to save water, you might not want this latter feature.
- **Selectable spin speed**: You can set the spin speed to whatever you like on some programs. A higher spin speed will result in drier clothes, or you may want a slower speed for delicates.
- **Heater**: All the front loaders have a heater; all the top loaders don't.

WHAT TO BUY

A **Best Buy** indicates that a model is a reasonable performer in its size bracket and its combined purchase and running costs are comparatively low. The other models in the *What to Buy* list are the overall top performers in their size bracket out of all the models in the table, but they'll cost more to buy and/or run than the **Best Buys**. We've included top and front loaders in each size range where possible.

Small (up to 5.5 kg)

MIELE Novotronic W 828 (fr)	$1799
NEW **SIMPSON Esprit 45S551D** (fr) ◀ BEST BUY ▶	$849
WHIRLPOOL AWM 5100 (fr) ◀ BEST BUY ▶	$999
SIMPSON Esprit 550 36S550K* (tp) ◀ BEST BUY ▶	$649

Large (7.5 kg or more)

FISHER & PAYKEL Intuitive Eco IW811 (tp) ◀ BEST BUY ▶	$1362

fr — front loader, tp — top loader

* *We've included the Simpson Esprit 550 36S550K, Fisher & Paykel Intuitive Eco IW711 and Hoover 600MD as they performed well in most areas and are relatively cheap, but note that they didn't score well for gentleness. See* Not so gentle, *left, for more on the gentleness scores. If you have clothes that are delicate, use the 'delicates' cycle on these machines.*

Medium (6 to 7 kg)

NEW **ARISTON Margherita 2000 AL 129X** (fr)	$1599
WHIRLPOOL 6th Sense AWM 8121 (fr) ◀ BEST BUY ▶	$1249
LG Intellowasher WD 8074FHB (fr) ◀ BEST BUY ▶	$1099
WESTINGHOUSE Mastermind LF711C (fr) ◀ BEST BUY ▶	$1199
WESTINGHOUSE Mastermind LF708C (fr) ◀ BEST BUY ▶	$999
FISHER & PAYKEL Intuitive Eco IW711* (tp)	$1228
FISHER & PAYKEL Excellence GW611 (tp)	$1007
HOOVER 600MD (tp)* ◀ BEST BUY ▶	$699

The **ASKO**, **BOSCH** and the other two **LG Intellowasher** models that scored 76% overall (see the table, page 46) would also be worth considering in this size range if you find them for a good price. Their overall performance is as good as that of the **LG** and **WESTINGHOUSEs** in the *What to buy* list, but they're more expensive and so don't qualify as a Best Buy.

NEW BEST BUYS and TOP PERFORMERS

For profiles of models in the *What to buy* list that aren't given here, see CHOICE, March 2003 and September 2002, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au (click on 'washing machines' in the A-Z list). Also see *More information online*, page 48.

BEST BUYS

UP TO 5.5 KG: FRONT LOADER
SIMPSON ESPRIT 455551D

Price: $849

Good scores all round and easy to use. Very good value for money. It has a program progress indicator, fast-wash option and a wide range of wash temperatures, but no delay start feature.

6–7 KG: FRONT LOADER
WHIRLPOOL 6TH SENSE AWM 8121

Price: $1249

Scored well in all areas, has intuitive controls and a wide range of features including a fast-wash program and water-saving option. However, it has the second longest 'normal' wash cycle time of 152 minutes, and no delay start option.

TOP PERFORMERS

6–7 KG: FRONT LOADER
ARISTON MARGHERITA 2000 AL 129X

Price: $1599

A good overall performer with a fast-wash option, program progress indicator and a wide range of wash temperatures. On the downside, it does have the longest 'normal' wash cycle time of all the machines tested — 162 minutes.

6–7 KG: TOP LOADERS
FISHER & PAYKEL EXCELLENCE GW611

Price: $1007

Good in most areas, and scored particularly well for spin efficiency. A good range of features, but only scored 50% for gentleness.

FISHER & PAYKEL INTUITIVE ECO IW711

Price: $1228

Has a wide range of program options including fast-wash option and delay start. It has many water level options and a fabric care auto-sensing function, plus customised programming. On the downside it's not very gentle on clothes.

Saving energy (and money) in the laundry

WASHING

- In the long term, a front loader should save you money as they're more energy and water-efficient and gentler on clothes.
- To save energy, wash in cold water — previous tests have shown little difference in wash performance, and you're especially unlikely to notice a difference on non-whites. If you do use a warm or hot wash, choose a cold rinse (most 'normal' wash programs automatically rinse in cold water anyway). If you regularly use fabric softener, you'll need to do a hot wash every so often to clean your machine.
- Try to always wash a full load — it takes as much energy and water to wash a full load as a half unless the machine has a special half-load or small-load setting and/or you can adjust the water level. However, don't overload the machine or it may not wash well.
- If your machine has energy-saving features, use them. These include a fast-wash program for more lightly soiled clothes, water-saving programs that will also save energy, and making sure you match the temperature of the wash to the dirtiness of the clothes.
- Don't use too much detergent: it makes the machine work harder and might also leave residue in the clothes that requires an extra rinse.
- Presoak heavily soiled items so that you don't have to wash them twice.

DRYING

- If you use a clothes dryer regularly, look for a washing machine with a higher spin speed so that it extracts more water and your washing needs less time to dry.
- Place the clothes dryer near ventilation, or better still have it ducted outside. Humid air circulating around it will increase drying time and energy costs.
- Dry only full loads in the dryer. Separate loads into heavy and

How reliable have subscribers found them?

We asked our subscribers whether their washing machine had needed repairing in the previous 12 months, and whether they'd buy the same brand again. Overall, 16% had needed repairing, with front loaders slightly more likely to than top loaders. Differences of more than 7% are meaningful, and the numbers in brackets are the number of responses we received for each brand.

PERCENTAGE NOT NEEDING REPAIR

Miele (396)	93
Maytag (332)	92
Kleenmaid (1317)	90
Hitachi (836)	88
Whirlpool (1341)	86
Westinghouse (366)	85
Asko Asea (698)	84
Simpson (3437)	84
Fisher & Paykel (6564)	83
Samsung (101)	82
Admiral (277)	81
Hoover (4341)	81
GE (371)	77
Bendix (610)	71
Thor (161)	71

PERCENTAGE WHO'D BUY THE SAME BRAND AGAIN

Miele (402)	98
Fisher & Paykel (6626)	94
Asko Asea (706)	93
Maytag (337)	93
Hitachi (833)	92
Kleenmaid (1322)	91
Samsung (96)	88
Westinghouse (362)	88
Whirlpool (1357)	86
Hoover (4318)	85
Simpson (3436)	84
GE (362)	81
Bendix (609)	80
Admiral (259)	73
Thor (157)	72

lightweight, as lighter clothes will take less time to dry.

- Dry consecutive loads — you'll use less energy as the dryer is already heated, even if it has a cool-down phase.
- Clean the lint filter after each use to maintain full airflow and maximise drying efficiency.
- Don't use more heat than you need, and remove clothes as soon as they're dry to minimise wrinkling and save energy.

TIPS

- Hang creased clothes in the bathroom while you shower, as the warm, moist air relaxes the wrinkles and you may not have to iron them.
- Some washing machines still use some energy even when they're not washing clothes, so switch it off and unplug it when it's not being used. It could also save your machine from damage should there be a power surge.

ANTHONY SAMPERS

Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	1 Type	PERFORMANCE 2 Overall score (%)	3 Dirt removal score (%)	4 Gentleness score (%)	5 Spin efficiency score (%)	6 Energy efficiency score (%)	7 Water efficiency score (%)	7 Water used (L)
UP TO 5.5 KG								
MIELE Novotronic W 828	Front	80	80	76	81	89	76	61
♦ **SIMPSON** Esprit 455551D	Front	75	72	73	77	84	73	73
WHIRLPOOL AWM 5100	Front	75	70	74	74	83	79	57
ARISTON Margherita 2000 AB95	Front	74	70	82	73	83	69	87
SIMPSON Esprit 550 365550K	Top / agitator	66	76	46	64	70	57	117
FISHER & PAYKEL Pride MW511	Top / agitator	65	69	47	78	73	54	127
HOOVER 500MD **(A)**	Top / agitator	65	75	46	71	64	53	118
FISHER & PAYKEL Excellence GW511	Top / agitator	64	62	60	77	70	52	133
♦ **SIMPSON** Esprit 450 36P450K	Top / agitator	63	70	52	64	66	50	112
NEC NW-452	Top / impeller	56	60	58	56	62	36	145
6 KG TO 7 KG								
♦ **ARISTON** Margherita 2000 AL129X	Front	77	79	70	79	82	72	84
WHIRLPOOL 6th Sense AWM 8121	Front	77	74	69	85	82	83	60
♦ **ASKO** Quattro W6231	Front	76	70	74	80	86	78	65
♦ **ASKO** Quattro W6021 **(B)**	Front	76	70	74	80 **(B)**	86	78	65
♦ **BOSCH** Maxx 1000 WFO 2060	Front	76	71	70	75	90	81	62
♦ **BOSCH** Maxx 1000 WFO 2460 **(C)**	Front	76	71	70	75 **(C)**	90	81	62
LG Intellowasher WD-1074FHB **(D)**	Front	76	72	70	78	91	73	95
LG Intellowasher WD-8074FHB **(E)**	Front	76	72	70	78 **(E)**	91	73	95
LG Intellowasher WD-1274FHB **(F)**	Front	76	72	70	78 **(F)**	91	73	95
WESTINGHOUSE Mastermind LF711C	Front	76	72	70	78	91	73	95
WESTINGHOUSE Mastermind LF708C **(G)**	Front	76	72	70	78 **(G)**	91	73	95
♦ **BOSCH** Maxx 800 WFL 1660	Front	73	68	71	66	91	77	74
♦ **BOSCH** Maxx Sportline WFL 1800 **(H)**	Front	73	68	71	66 **(H)**	91	77	74
AEG Lavamat W830-W **(D)**	Front	72	66	66	70	90	76	72
FISHER & PAYKEL Intuitive Eco IW711 **(J)**	Top / agitator	68	72	42	77	85	58	149
FISHER & PAYKEL Excellence GW611 **(J)**	Top / agitator	68	75	50	81	71	53	154
HOOVER 600MD **(A)**	Top / agitator	68	78	44	65	74	60	120
SIMPSON Encore 605 365605K	Top / agitator	67	77	40	67	75	59	122
♦ **LG** Fuzzy Logic WF-T653A	Top / impeller	66	80	59	57	59	50	161
WHIRLPOOL 6ALBR6245JQ	Top / agitator	64	72	54	57	63	59	123
SAMSUNG Triflow SW65ASP	Top / impeller	63	73	54	58	62	53	153
7.5 KG OR LARGER								
FISHER & PAYKEL Intuitive Eco IW811 **(J)**	Top / agitator	72	74	54	84	86	56	177
FISHER & PAYKEL Excellence GW711 **(J)**	Top / agitator	68	69	54	86	72	55	168
SAMSUNG Triflow SW95ASP	Top / impeller	68	75	60	61	73	59	192
HITACHI SF-H800PX	Top / impeller	67	74	52	79	62	55	180
WHIRLPOOL 6ALSR7244JQ1	Top / agitator	67	73	55	70	67	58	159
WHIRLPOOL 6ALSQ8000JQ	Top / agitator	67	73	55	70	67	58	159
SIMPSON Enduro 801 22S801K	Top / agitator	66	71	50	74	71	54	185
SIMPSON Enduro 802 22S802K **(K)**	Top / agitator	66	71	50	74	71	54	185
SIMPSON Encore 806 22S806K **(K)**	Top / agitator	66	71	50	74	71	54	185
SIMPSON Encore 807 22S807K **(K)**	Top / agitator	66	71	50	74	71	54	185
HOOVER 750LD **(A)**	Top / agitator	63	70	46	68	68	49	189
HOOVER 800RLD **(A)**	Top / agitator	63	65	50	72	69	53	186
SIMPSON Esprit 750 22S750K	Top / agitator	61	61	52	75	68	48	194
♦ **KLEENMAID** LWK24AW-3050	Top / agitator	58	56	65	51	64	52	167
♦ **KLEENMAID** LWK74AW-3050	Top / agitator	58	56	65	51	64	52	167

Footnotes and table notes are on page 48.

9	10 FEATURES							SPECIFICATIONS						
Running costs ($ / 10 years)*	Delay start (hours)	Out-of-balance correction	Anti-crease	Selectable spin speed	Load sensor	Extra rinse	Water-saver option	Cold-only tap connection needed**	Capacity (kg)	Dimensions (H x W x D, cm)***	Warranty (years)†	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)‡
417		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			5.0	85 x 60 x 64	2	Germany	Miele	1799
589		✓	✓	✓			✓		5.5	85 x 60 x 57	2	Italy	Electrolux	849
557	0 to 9	✓	✓	✓				Y	5.5	85 x 60 x 58	2	Italy	Whirlpool	999
649		✓	✓				✓	Y **(M)**	5.5	84 x 60 x 54	5	Italy	Ariston	1099
1023			✓					Cap	5.5	101 x 58 x 63	2	Australia	Electrolux	649
1022		✓		✓		✓		Cap	5.5	101 x 56 x 59	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	780
1090								Cap	5.0	99 x 58 x 61	2	Australia	Electrolux	599
1100	1, 3, 9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Cap	5.5	102 x 56 x 58	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	896
973								Cap	4.5	105 x 58 x 63	2	Australia	Electrolux	599
1176	2 to 48	✓			✓			Y	4.5	85 x 53 x 61	2	Korea	NEC	549
708	1, 3, 9, 12	ns	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Y **(M)**	6.0	85 x 60 x 54	2	Italy	Ariston	1599
674		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Y	7.0	86 x 60 x 60	2	Italy	Whirlpool	1249
539	0 to 5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6.0	85 x 60 x 59	2	Sweden	Asko	1849
539	0 to 5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6.0	85 x 60 x 59	2	Sweden	Asko	1699
470	0 to 19	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6.5	86 x 60 x 59	2	Thailand	Bosch	1799
470	0 to 19	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6.5	86 x 60 x 59	2	Thailand	Bosch	1999
634	3 to 19 **(L)**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			7.0	85 x 60 x 65	2	Korea	LG	1399
634	3 to 19 **(L)**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			7.0	85 x 60 x 65	2	Korea	LG	1099
634	3 to 19 **(L)**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			7.0	85 x 60 x 65	2	Korea	LG	1499
634	3 to 19 **(L)**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Cap	7.0	85 x 60 x 65	2	Korea	Electrolux	1199
634	3 to 19 **(L)**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Cap	7.0	85 x 60 x 65	2	Korea	Electrolux	999
478		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6.5	86 x 60 x 59	2	Thailand	Bosch	1199
478		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6.5	86 x 60 x 59	2	Thailand	Bosch	1399
486		✓	✓	✓					6.0	85 x 60 x 61	3	Germany	Andi Co	1699
944	0.25 to 18	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ **(J)**	Cap	7.0	101 x 60 x 63	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	1228
1259	1, 3, 9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ **(J)**	Cap	6.5	102 x 60 x 62	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	1007
1002			✓					Cap	6.0	100 x 58 x 64	2	Australia	Electrolux	699
997			✓	✓		✓		Cap	6.0	100 x 58 x 64	2	Australia	Electrolux	725
1564	1 to 48	✓	✓		✓	✓			6.5	96 x 59 x 61	2	Korea	LG	899
1262		✓				✓		Y	6.0	101 x 61 x 67	2	USA	Whirlpool	849
1498	3 to 18		✓		✓	✓		Cap	6.5	101 x 69 x 71	1	Korea	Samsung	749
1080	0.25 to 18	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ **(J)**	Cap	8.0	100 x 65 X 65	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	1362
1405	1, 3, 9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ **(J)**	Cap	7.5	100 x 65 x 65	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	1118
1669	1 to 18		✓		✓	✓		Cap	9.5	106 x 66 x 76	2	Korea	Samsung	1099
1779	3 to 12	✓	✓		✓			Cap **(M)**	8.0	95 x 63 x 68	2	Japan	Hitachi	999
1473			✓					Y	7.5	108 x 69 x 70	2	USA	Whirlpool	949
1473			✓					Y	7.5	108 x 69 x 70	2	USA	Whirlpool	949
1529		✓	✓					Cap	8.0	108 x 68 x 72	2	Australia	Electrolux	999
1529		✓	✓				✓	Cap	8.0	108 x 68 x 72	2	Australia	Electrolux	1099
1529		✓	✓	✓			✓	Cap	8.0	108 x 68 x 72	2	Australia	Electrolux	1049
1529	1 to 23	✓	✓	✓			✓	Cap	8.0	108 x 68 x 72	2	Australia	Electrolux	1149
1569		✓	✓				✓	Cap	7.5	104 x 68 x 72	2	Australia	Electrolux	849
1606		✓	✓					Cap	8.0	105 x 68 x 72	2	Australia	Electrolux	999
1572			✓					Cap	7.5	106 x 68 x 71	2	Australia	Electrolux	849
1521		✓	✓					Cap	7.5	109 x 65 x 71	5	USA	Kleenmaid	2199
1521		✓	✓	✓				Cap	7.5	109 x 65 x 71	5	USA	Kleenmaid	2299

For people with a disability

We asked an occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre to assess the washing machines in our *What to buy* list to see which are a better choice for people with various disabilities.

- If you're a wheelchair user, a front loader with a wide opening and a door that opens 180° is easier to load and unload. The **ARISTON Margherita 2000 AL129X** would be a good choice.
- If you're visually impaired, you want a machine with large, well-spaced letters and good contrast, as well as good feedback such as loud beeps or lights when you press the buttons. The **FISHER & PAYKEL** models are good, as you can also program your favourite cycle and then just push one button each time you do a load.
- If you have problems using your hands, make sure the door's easy to open and the detergent dispenser easy to remove. Look for large, raised dials with a crossbar that's easy to grip, or buttons that are easy to press. Models such as the **FISHER & PAYKELs** with one-touch start or programming minimise the need to use your hands.

MORE INFORMATION ONLINE

For more on what to look for in a washing machine, go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Sep 03 under 'washing machines' in the A–Z index. You can also rank tested models according to your preferences using our interactive compare-a-product feature.

If you don't have access to the web, send a stamped (85 cents in NSW, 95 cents in other states), self-addressed A5 or larger envelope to Washing machines, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, and we'll send you the information (obviously we can't send you compare-a-product).

◆ *Newly tested model. Models joined by a square bracket in the table are technically similar.*

* *Includes any energy used when not in use, but with power on.*

** *Some models need a Y-shaped connector or a cap to connect to cold water only.*

*** *Dimensions are for the smallest box that fits around the machine, allowing for inlet and drain hoses.*

† *Warranty conditions vary, so check with the manufacturer.*

‡ *Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in June 2003.*

ns *Not stated.*

(A) *Model number changes since testing, but still technically the same: 500MB tested now 500MD, 600MB now 600MD, 750LC now 750LD and 800RLC now 800RLD.*

(B) *It has a lower maximum spin speed than the 6231 so may give poorer spin efficiency, is slightly noisier, and doesn't have a rinse or spin hold.*

(C) *Higher maximum spin speed than the Maxx 1000 WFO 2060, so may give better spin efficiency.*

(D) *Discontinued, but may still be available in some stores.*

(E) *Lower maximum speed spin than the WD-1074, so may give poorer spin efficiency.*

(F) *Higher maximum speed spin than the WD-1074, so may give better spin efficiency.*

(G) *Lower maximum speed spin than the LF711C, so may give poorer spin efficiency.*

(H) *Higher maximum spin speed than the Maxx 800 WFL 1660, so may give better spin efficiency.*

(J) *Model number changes since testing, but still technically the same: GW611 tested now GW612, GW711 now GW712, IW711 now IW712 and IW811 now IW812; you may find both the old and new model numbers in shops. Also all these models have been upgraded to include a new water-saving feature.*

(K) *Technically similar to the Enduro 801, but with different features.*

(L) *Delay finish.*

(M) *Supplied.*

1 Type

The top-loading machines in this test either work via an agitator or an impeller. An agitator sticks up through the centre of the drum from the base and twists and turns the clothes to create movement through the water. Impeller models have an open drum with the impeller at the bottom — it looks like a small bump in the base with ridges that run out from the centre. Movement is created by the impeller's rotation in the base of the drum, creating turbulence.

2 Overall score

Dirt removal makes up 40% of the overall score — gentleness and spin, water and energy efficiency are each 15%. All tests are on a 'normal' warm wash cycle.

3 Dirt removal score

We measured how much light was reflected from specially soiled swatches before and after washing. We use a spectrocolorimeter, which is more accurate than the human eye; differences of around 6% are visible. The evenness of the wash is also taken into account.

4 Gentleness score

We attached swatches of easily frayed fabric to the garments in each load, measuring the unfrayed area of the swatch before and after the wash.

5 Spin efficiency score

We weighed the clothes before and after washing to see how well the machine extracts water using the highest spin speed.

6 Energy efficiency score

This is calculated according to the kilowatt hours (kWh) of electricity used for each kilogram of washing, including heating the water.

7 Water efficiency/water used

We measured the amount of water used per 'normal' wash and calculated the amount of water used per kilogram of the test load.

8 Noise

These are the maximum noise levels recorded during the spin cycle, measured 1 m away from the machine and 1 m above the ground. The noise level of these machines is around that of a normal conversation.

9 Running costs

This is an estimate of how much it'll cost you over 10 years for water and electricity if you wash the equivalent of one load every day using a 'normal' cycle, based on 12.5 cents per kWh for electricity and $1 per 1000 L for water, and including any electricity used when the machine's switched on but not in use.

10 Features

See CHOICE, September 2002, for more on features or functions other than those listed under *What to look for*, page 43, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on Sep 03 under 'washing machines' in the A–Z index.

recalls&bans

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Federal Treasury website: ***www.recalls.gov.au****. If you don't have web access, call the* ***Consumer Safety Unit*** *on (02) 6263 2747.*

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

THE PRODUCT: GlaxoSmithKline has recalled **Children's Panadol Original Easy Dose Baby Drops**, AUST R83362, all batches; and **Children's Panadol 1 month – 2 years Colourfree Easy Dose Baby Drops** AUST R83363, all batches.
The problem: If used incorrectly, the plastic neck insert may dislodge and attach itself to the end of the syringe, posing a choking hazard.
What to do: Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or call 1800 028 533 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Fisher-Price has recalled **Sparkling Symphony mobile**, manufactured from October 1999 to November 2000 and available from December 1999 to December 2001 for around $65. It attaches to the cot side rail and plays music and lights that are activated by remote control. Four star and moon characters are suspended from the mobile, which turns, and it has a model number 71985. This can be found on the lower arm of the mobile and on the back of the remote control.
The problem: If the batteries in the mobile leak, the caustic liquid can seep out of the battery compartment, posing a risk of chemical burns.
What to do: Stop using the mobile and store it safely. Call 1800 674 753 between 9 am and 5 pm EST to order a free repair kit containing a seal for the battery compartment, which will prevent battery leakage.

THE PRODUCT: Chandru International has recalled **Austina toothpick holder, bathroom accessories and cotton bud holder**, sold in NSW.
The problem: They contain a blue liquid (with yellow ducks in it) that could be hazardous if ingested.
What to do: Stop using them immediately and return them to the place of purchase for a refund.

THE PRODUCT: Babylove Products has recalled **Babylove wooden sleigh cot**, BL SCOT GWE model BQ:1223 (on base slats). It was sold through Toys R Us and independent retailers from October 2002.
The problem: It fails to comply with the Australian standard.
What to do: Call 1300 131 477 between 8:30 am and 5 pm EST to arrange return of the product and a refund.

THE PRODUCT: Focus Lifestyle Products has recalled the **Grand Hall Regulator 7060R** (right-angle type with production code 0237 N stamped on the regulator assembly), used in the **Focus Table Top Patio Heater** model PH105A, sold between November 2002 and June 2003.
The problem: In the regulator assemblies, the brass fitting that connects the gas cylinder may not have been attached to the regulator correctly. This could result in a gas leak at the joint between the brass fitting and the regulator body.
What to do: Stop using the regulator immediately and call 1800 680 405 to arrange for an exchange of the regulator assembly component.

THE PRODUCT: C Stuart has recalled **Baby Towelling Bath Cradle**, sold under the brand names Classic Pooh (Target, Baby Target), Looney Tunes (Target, Baby Target), Big Softies (Myer Grace Bros, Baby Target) and Paddleduck (Big W and Kmart).
The problem: It doesn't meet mandatory labelling requirements as it isn't permanently labelled to warn parents or carers not to leave a child unattended in it.
What to do: Return it to your nearest Big W, Myer Grace Bros, Kmart, Target or Baby Target store for a refund, or call 1800 333 075 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Target Australia has recalled a **Newborn Boys Tracksuit with plastic squeaker badge**, sold through Target, Baby Target and Target Country Stores from June 2002. It was sold in sizes 0000–1 and came in two designs: navy blue pants/powder blue top featuring a plastic car squeaker badge and the words Honk Honk; and blue denim pants/orange top featuring a monster truck plastic squeaker badge and the words Vroom Vroom.
The problem: The method used to attach the plastic squeaker badge to the top doesn't meet safety specifications, posing a choking hazard if the badge becomes detached and the squeaker is exposed.
What to do: Return it to your nearest Target, Baby Target or Target Country store for a refund, or call 1800 814 788 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Baby on a Budget has recalled **Bath EZ Bather by Snuggle Time**, on sale between November 19, 2002, and June 18, 2003, in Baby on a Budget stores in WA.
The problem: There's no fixed label to explain that a baby shouldn't be left unattended in the bath.
What to do: Return it to your nearest Baby on a Budget store for a refund, or phone (08) 9456 0770 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Mundella Foods has recalled **Mundella Feta Supreme Mediterranean style feta cheese**, best-before date of 22.09.03, sold in a 250 g plastic vacuum pack in WA.
The problem: The product may be contaminated with *E coli* bacteria.
What to do: Don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 636 335 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Goodman Fielder has recalled **Uncle Tobys Porridge Plus Variety Pack**, 360 g, best before 18-12-03 and 20-12-03.
The problem: It contains apple and custard sachets that may contain egg that's not declared on the packaging.
What to do: Don't eat it if you have an allergy to egg protein. Call 1800 641 276 to obtain a refund or for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Green's General Foods has recalled **Green's Tweety Cupcakes**, 240 g, best-before dates 21 Feb 04, 28 Mar 04 and 16 May 04, and **Green's Bugs Bunny Cupcakes**, 240 g, best-before dates 20 Feb 04, 21 Feb 04 and 28 Mar 04.
The problem: They contain skim milk powder and soy lecithin that aren't declared in the ingredients list.
What to do: Don't eat them if you have a milk or soy protein allergy or intolerance. Call 1800 803 605 8 am–7 pm EST Monday to Friday to arrange a refund and for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Duong Vanthen has recalled **Xiang Xiang Golden Roast Vegetarian Duck**, 500 g, use-by 01/12/04, APN 8887 127100149, and sold in metropolitan Melbourne.
The problem: The product incorrectly claims to be egg-free.
What to do: Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

THE PRODUCT: Oceanic Food has recalled **Sun Shun Fuk Chilly Soup Flavoured Sichuan Spicy Noodle**, 160 g, best-before dates 28/12/03 and 28/7/04, sold in metropolitan Melbourne.
The problem: It contains milk protein that's not listed on the label.
What to do: Don't eat it if you have a milk allergy. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

THE PRODUCT: Kadac has recalled **Ancient Harvest Quinoa Supergrain Pasta**, 227 g packet, in Garden Pagoda and Rotelle & Veggie Curl varieties, all use-by dates up to and including 07.11.04, and imported from the USA.
The problem: A claim on the packaging states the product is gluten-free, but it contains gluten and may pose a health risk to those with coeliac disease, or with a sensitivity to gluten.
What to do: Don't eat it if you have coeliac disease or are sensitive to gluten. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call (03) 9583 1522 for more information.

THE PRODUCT: Leda Nutrition has recalled **Slim & Natural Banana, Date & Pecan breakfast bars** (best-before dates 4/11/03, 18/11/03 and 2/12/03), and **Tropical Breakfast Bar Snack Bar** (best-before dates 8/10/03 and 5/11/03), 2 x 45 g bars, sold in Queensland, SA, Victoria and WA.
The problem: A claim on the packaging states the product is gluten-free, but it contains gluten and may pose a health risk to those with coeliac disease, or with a sensitivity to gluten.
What to do: Don't eat it if you have coeliac disease or are sensitive to gluten. For a refund of product and postage, return it to Leda Nutrition, PO Box 2613, Burleigh DC 4220, or ring (07) 5520 2351 for more information.

aboutchoice

Published by the Australian Consumers' Association

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YOUR LETTERS

We welcome the letters you send us — please always include a daytime telephone number so we can contact you quickly if we want to follow up your letter. We're sorry we can't answer every letter we receive, but we do use them in our research. Thanks for taking the time to keep in touch.

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*** indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls. For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts and other small pieces.**

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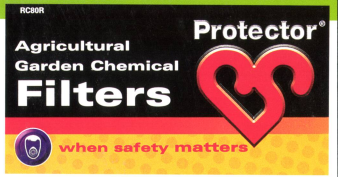

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To deflect the glaring lack of superlatives?

As a promo, this left us somewhat underwhelmed. However, we were excited by the claim that colletion is very simple, because there's nothing worse than trying to collete an uncolletable sun shade.

Er, yep. So, does anyone know what colletion is? The first reader to give us a plausible (and preferably amusing!) answer that fits this context wins a copy of the *Hard Word* book. See contact details below.

The winner of *The Hard Word* book for this month's best entry is S Dixon. Your book is on its way. Keep the entries coming for your chance to win.

HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The Hard Word would like to thank all the readers who've responded with examples of outrageous ads, promotions and products. Thanks to A Spence, D Horgan, M & P Bean, J Clough, J Gray and S Dixon for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep them coming.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email your suggestions to thehardword@choice.com.au.